

Requiem For A Dream

AmeliaKat

Star Wars

Complete



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Table of Contents

Cover
Title Page
Copyright Information
Table of Contents
Summary
1. Prologue
2. Undone
3. Keep Breathing
4. Bad Guy
5. Wild Wolves
6. Anti-Hero
7. Lost
8. Percussion Gun
9. Welcome Home
10. Where Does The Good Go?
11. Burned Bridges
12. Saving For A Rainy Day
13. Wreck Me
14. Cold Surrender
15. Sex, Lies & Politics
16. Dark Side Of The Morning - Part I
17. Angel Of The Morning - Part II
18. What Is To Become Of Me
19. The Willow Symbolism
20. One Last Time
21. Rise and Fall
22. Death Of A Dream - Part I
23. Death Of A Dream - Part II
24. Epilogue

Summary

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1. Prologue

Prologue

*I can't afford to watch you walk away
These games you play, are bringing me down
If you could see, all of this sorrow in me
I've got to believe you'd stick around*

If I'd known then what I know now

If I'd known then what I know now my love

"She's asking about him." Obi-Wan spoke once he joined Yoda in the waiting room. His face scratched up, his Jedi robes hanging off him, and he had a perpetually tired look in his eyes.

"Tell her, you must." Yoda commanded. Observing Obi-Wan, Yoda could see he was riddled with guilt. "Tell her!"

"I can't." Obi-Wan said with a gloomy sigh. "It'll destroy her."

"About to change, her life is." Yoda reminded Obi-Wan of the responsibility Padme will now have to keep her children safe and hidden from the Emperor. "Be prepared, she must."

Obi-Wan entered the maternity unit in the hospital, heading straight for Padme's room. Her body seemed frail as she lied there in bed, trying to get some rest. Her skin was pale, and her hair disheveled. Her eyes soon fluttered open once he joined her at her bedside.

"Did Anakin come?" She asked, her voice groggy.

Obi-Wan looked down at her weakly.

"...I'm sorry." He uttered, his face pained with grief. He lowered his head. "He — he didn't make it."

"What?" She gasped, her voice barely audible. For a second her heart stopped, as she pulled herself to sit upright.

Padme began to panic, feeling her stomach twist.

"I," Obi-Wan quavered. "I had no choice."

Her hand flew to her chest, sniveling — trying to control her inhalations.

“Yes you did!” she bawled, trembling as the tears came rolling down her cheeks. “You did have a choice. You always have a choice!”

“He was too far gone.” Obi-Wan reasoned, hopelessly. His words sounded like a plea, with a fragile cadence in his voice.

“No — no, I—” Padme shook her head, refusing to accept it. “I could have brought him back.” She insisted with a frantic cry.

Obi-Wan shook his head, apologetically. “Padme—”

He tried to reach for her in an effort to console her but she whacked his hand away.

“Don’t touch me.” She spat nervously, shuddering.

Obi-Wan helplessly tried to reconcile with her, bending down to her level, taking her hand in his.

“No!” She wailed. “No! Get out.”

His eyes began to well up with tears as he stood before her.

“Get out!” She barked.

He sheepishly left the room, and she burst into tears.

Obi-Wan, Yoda and Bail continued to check in each day since the birth of the twins. The medical droid informed them of Padme’s condition, diagnosing her with depression. The babies were being cared for by nurses in a separate unit.

Saddened by the news, the three of them were at a loss for words — not knowing what to do, other than getting these babies out of here and as far away from Palpatine as possible.

Bail and Obi-Wan couldn’t make sense of it. They didn’t know how to connect with her. They’ve always known Padme as a vibrant, strong, passionate leader — they didn’t know how to deal with her like this.

And Yoda could sense their perturbation.

“As a colleague, a senator on an ordinary day, you cannot treat her. A frightened mother, she is now. A scared, heartbroken, patient, she is.”

Bail abruptly stood up, deciding to go check on her himself.

Padme turned to face him as soon as she heard the door swing open.

“Bail.” She muttered, unable to sit up. Her voice was quiet, brittle. Her eyes were bloodshot, her cheeks puffy from all the crying. “What are you doing here?”

“I thought you could use a friend.” He shrugged, offering her a faint smile as he walked over.

She remained silent. Her absent eyes glazed over the bed.

“...I know what loss feels like.” Bail began, “And it’s okay to be upset for a little while. .but just for a little while.”

His gentle eyes were soothing but he still couldn’t get a reaction out of her, as her bleak eyes stared into space.

“Padme, don’t let the darkness win.” He stressed. “We need you. Your babies need you.”

Tears began to stream down her face as she hopelessly mewled: “I can’t do it.”

“You can — and you will.” He asserted.

“I’m not strong enough.” She cried

“Well you’re going to have to be.” Bail said firmly. “Those kids in there, they need you.”

She closed her eyes, unable to hear those words. She felt terrible enough as it is.

“They’ve already lost a father.” Bail sighed. “Are they going to lose their mother too?”

He paused, realizing that he didn’t need her to answer. He knew she was taking it all in.

He began to head out of the room once she turned away from him.

But once he reached the door, he turned to face her once more.

“One more thing.” He interjected. “He loved him too — Obi-Wan.”

Padme’s eyes raised slightly, still unable to make eye contact but it was clear she was listening — even though her face was impassive.

And Bail reiterated, “*He* loved him *too*.”

Only a couple of days had passed, Obi-Wan checked in on the children daily, following up with the medical droids on Padme’s well-being.

He sat there, holding Luke in his arms, while Leia slept in her crib. He was determined to do right by these kids. He couldn’t fail again.

Just then, Padme entered the unit. Obi-Wan’s eyes lifted.

“—I was just leaving.” He quietly blurted out.

And Padme let out a weakened sigh.

“Stay.” She murmured, walking over to them.

She grabbed a chair and sat beside them, looking down at her baby boy.

There was a clear distance between her and Obi-Wan. He didn’t know how to react. All he could do was give her space and hope that she’d heal, and find it in her heart to forgive him.

“He likes you.” She finally breathed out. Her voice frail like she hadn’t spoken in a long time.

Obi-Wan glanced up at her, grateful that she was meeting him halfway. He then gazed back at the baby, who appeared to smirk at him, and started to feel a sense of hope. “He has a great smile.”

Padme was suddenly quiet. Her eyes lowered to the ground.

“Like his dad.” She drawled finally

Obi-Wan paused before turning to face her. His sorrowful eyes gazed upon her.

“I’m so sorry, Padme.” He whispered earnestly, full of despair.

She swallowed a gulp, taking a moment to fight back tears.

She let out a deep breath, trying not to choke up. “I know.”

Once Obi-Wan and Padme arrived on Naboo with the children, he helped her unpack, put the babies to bed, and was just about to head off.

“If you need anything just give me a call.” He said warmly, while on his way out. When she didn’t reply, he turned back around.

Padme remained stood in the kitchen, leaning her hands on the counter, her eyes downcast.

“...I can’t do this.” She puled softly, closing her eyes.

Obi-Wan released an exhale, his empathic nature could feel her grief.

“Padme—” He politely urged, making his way towards her.

“—He said he’d be here!” She cried, anxiously, now facing him — her woeful eyes filled with a combination of worry, resentment, fear and devastation. “He promised me!”

Obi-Wan’s heart broke a little as he watched her eyes fill with tears.

“I can’t do this without him!” She panicked. “I can’t do it alone.”

“Shh.” Obi-Wan soothed, wrapping his arms around her, trying to calm her down.

Her hopeless eyes fell closed once she rested her head on his shoulder.

“Listen to me.” His voice was feathery yet crisp, managing to put her at ease. “You are not alone. You have me.”

Once the Star Destroyer landed on Mustafar, Palpatine waited until Tarkin was out of earshot.

“They’re holding a funeral for senator Amidala on Naboo.” The Emperor’s voice was as grating as the news to Vader.

Vader remained quiet but Palpatine could feel him tensing up.

He pushed past him, exiting the ship — and Palpatine snickered.

On Mustafar, Vader stood right in the spot where he last saw her, remembering an unconscious Padme fall to the floor after he force-choked her.

With a woeful sigh, he stepped back. He glanced up at the stars, and leaned against the wall.

Anakin leaned against the wall on Padme's balcony at the Naboo lake retreat. He watched her, looking beautiful in a backless gown of warm shades of yellow and purple that clasped around her neck.

She turned around, noticing him behind her, giving him a bright smile — an affectionate grin that lit up her eyes.

He made his way over to her, holding out his hand, gesturing for her to dance with him.

She placed her hand in his and he spun her around. She felt light-headed, feeling his hand slide across the small of her back, as he placed her arm over his shoulder.

Despite no music playing, their bodies found a shared rhythm. Their hips swayed as one, as he led her in circles. She felt like she was floating on air, held in his strong arms, gliding so effortlessly around the balcony.

Suddenly, he dipped her, and she felt a rush as her hair toppled down to the floor. She had literally been swept off her feet.

Letting out a girlish giggle, she could feel her heart pounding in her chest.

Anakin admired her fully — from the way her neck delicately curved up, her sultry lips parted to the way her smooth back felt against his fingers. He gradually lifted her back up, slow enough to feel the tension as his eyes gazed from her cleavage up to her lips.

Now upright, her eyes darted from his bright blue eyes to his ardent mouth. She was cautiously aware of the little space between them — there wasn't enough room for air to pass through. She had never heard her inhalations harmonizing so clearly with another person's before — it was almost deafening.

His eyes fervently staring at her mouth, dying to taste what he's been craving for so long now — no longer capable of showing restraint now that her lips were inches away.

His parted lips starving, his fingers gripped onto her a little tighter. Her cheeks suffused with red, nervous from how intently he looked at her.

Her awareness was heightened. She could feel his rough hands tenderly splayed across her back, urging her closer. She could feel his deliberate provocation as his hips pressed against hers.

A shaky breath left her lips just to be blocked by his mouth. His ragged breaths stained her lips as he stole a kiss. And she let him. Unable to break apart, she found herself giving into the sensuous touch of his lips on hers. He opens her mouth with his tongue as she invites him to deepen the kiss.

And she came to life — almost as if she had been asleep her whole life until this moment. Passion within her had been dormant. It just needed the right spark to ignite. Or the right man. A man who oozes passion — who was driven, reckless, spontaneous, impulsive, cunning and forthright — who was the opposite of everyone she had ever known.

And that thought scared her. She quickly pulled away, breathless as she escaped his grasp, leaving him panting.

She put an end to it. The unknown. This was not only uncharted territory but forbidden territory.

Padme sat on that same balcony, tortured by her memories — realizing there was no place she could go that didn't have traces of their love.

She shed a tear as she remembered their first kiss. Now bittersweet that he was gone. And he left the world in a devastating state. What a difference from the first memory of their love blossoming to their last encounter — with his hands viciously strangling her through the force.

And it's not like it was all good before their tragic end, even when he was around — you don't intertwine your life with a man who was driven, reckless, spontaneous, impulsive, cunning and forthright, and expect it to be easy. Obviously, looking up at the night sky and knowing the world will be even darker tomorrow, she knew the bad was exceptionally bad.

But despite the fact that he broke her heart, abandoned her and their two children, and broke every promise he ever made to her, she couldn't help but wonder if she'd do it all again. And take the bad as long as she could have the good.

Because the good was exceptionally good.

10 years later...

*My life goes on slowly without you
I move through space and time
I feel the air heavy upon my skin
And wonder if I'll see you again*

If I'd known then what I know now

If I'd known then what I know now my love

Space and Time — The Piercers

2. Undone

Undone

*Regrets collect like old friends
Here to relive your darkest moments
I can see no way, I can see no way
And all of the ghouls come out to play*

*Every demon wants his pound of flesh
But I like to keep some things to myself
I like to keep my issues drawn
It's always darkest before the dawn*

Vader entered his chamber, sitting on his adjustable chair. The droids began to piece apart his suit, taking his mechanical legs and arms off, along with his breathing device, mask and helmet.

Now a feeble body, he rested back as the chair reclined for him to lie flat, hoping to get some shut eye without the nightmares that have haunted him for over 10 years. 10 years since that fateful night. A night he couldn't forget — he had the emotional and physical scars to remind him everyday.

He used to look back on that night and be overcome with regret and guilt — but those feelings became too burdensome after a while. Now, he was so immersed in the dark side that he was rather disconnected from Anakin's emotions. He remembered what Anakin went through but it didn't resonate the way it once did. Now he often just felt angry at Anakin's failures, and continued to punish him for it by refusing to relate to him, connect to him, or let him breathe, pushing him further and further to the back of his mind. He never wanted to be him again. And looking back now, a decade later, he was so far from the man he used to be.

Vader's eyes flew open in an instant once the back of the chair rose, lifting him up. He waited for the droids to attach his limbs but nothing seemed to be operating. Glancing down, his eyes widened at the sight of himself. He lifted his left arm as though he never lost it, studying his calloused fingers, and then glancing at the other mechanical hand that replaced the one he lost to Count Dooku.

He reached up to place his hands on his face — he couldn't feel any scars, apart from the one across his right eye — he felt like himself again.

He then wiggled his toes, looking down at his legs. Placing his hands on either side of himself to sit better, straightening his back, he exhaled heavily, feeling a full breath emerge from his chest with no difficulty. His eyes curious, quizzical yet pleasantly surprised.

Resting back on the chair, he brushed his fringe away from his eyes — only to realize his hair returned. If that wasn't enough to riddle him with confusion, he then spotted a vision before him.

Padme.

She stood there, sporting a white satin gown that hugged her curves, the hem of her dress effortlessly flowing like ocean waves.

She slowly headed towards him. He blinked a couple of times, trying to work it out — his imagination hasn't been this vivid in a while.

But the closer she got, the more real it felt. A rush of warmth radiated off of her and onto him as she crawled onto his lap, lifting up her dress to rest on her thighs.

His hand coasted up her silky thigh. He could feel the softness of her skin at the tip of his fingers like it was only yesterday that he touched her.

He was just about to utter her name but she placed a finger over his mouth. Leaning in, her lips met his and both of them breathed out deeply, savoring the taste of one another, engulfed in the pleasure that only they shared.

His arms wrapped around her waist, possessively holding onto her, fearing it would all go away. His breathing intensified as his mouth remained plastered onto hers. A soft moan escaped her lips, melting him. It had been so long since he felt her breath on his lips, her soulful voice purring in his ear, her body perfectly pressed up against his — it had been so long since she was his.

Her right hand trailed down his virile chest, making her way down to his swelling appendage. He could feel her fingers delicately fondle his member, making him squirm under the elasticity of her hands. Finally, she pushed him inside her.

Heavy inhalations left his mouth followed by a dazed groan as he was submerged in her wet essence — lost in the euphoric sensation of being inside her, watching her writhing hips above him as she mounted him. His eyes idolizing her in this moment, caught up in this sexual eruption of their passion. He remembered it all — her touch as her fingers ran through his hair, her warmth as he placed his hands on her hips, driving himself deeper into her, and her sensuality as her lips brushed against his.

His hand found its way into her hair, loving the feel of his fingers entwined in her voluminous curls, knowing that it weakened her, making her putty in his hands.

Untangling her soft hair strands around his finger, his hand then slid down to her back, holding her in place.

Raising his mechanical hand, his fingers then drew across her clavicle up to her dainty neck, wrapping around it.

Suddenly, she started to choke. His fingers were tightening around her neck. He tried to loosen his grip but he couldn't.

He started to panic, watching her suffocate, unable to force his metal hand off of her — like he had no control over it.

Vader woke up in a fright. His chair still reclined, his body returned to its fragile state. Panting as he remembered the vivid dream that turned into yet another one of his nightmares. He hated that his most painful memories still managed to haunt him.

After a moment's reflection, his groggy voice ordered the droids to assemble his suit.

Taul, a low-ranking imperial employee, carefully stood guarding a door at the Inquisitors' Headquarters. He managed to remain discreet as others roamed about the Fortress Inquisitorius.

He then heard the whispers of passersby, declaring that Lord Vader was in today. Giving a subtle but firm knock on the door, alerting those inside.

But no answer.

Nudging the door with his elbow now in an effort to come across more assertive. "Dax!" He called, through gritted teeth.

But he wasn't quick enough as the dark figure now towered over him. Taul swallowed a gulp, as the Sith Lord cast a shadow over him.

Vader observed the young man quivering in his boots — scoffing at Taul's obvious feelings of inferiority. He felt such disdain for those he assumed were weak men.

"Move." Vader hissed, sensing that the man was hiding something, and Taul obliged after a moment's hesitation.

The door swung open, and Vader's eyes searched the room. A storm trooper helmet and two pairs of shoes haphazardly thrown on the floor.

He glanced up, his eyes settling on the imperial nurse lying on the mattress on the floor with a soldier slumped over her. The couple were frozen, now at the mercy of the evil Supreme Commander — the one who everyone hoped to avoid, especially in a compromising position such as this one.

Trying to catch their breaths with their eyes wide in shock, both were too afraid to move. Dax didn't want to expose his partner's intimate parts but he was also terrified to get up and be met with Vader's wrath.

Vader took a step towards them, lightly kicking the mattress with his boot as their heads lifted, peering up at the dark Lord with absolute fear.

"Sleeping on the job?" Vader sneered with his modulated, hoarse voice.

He shook his head, irritated. This was what he had to face — *these lowlives. Careless with their bodies and who they gave them to. Robbing themselves of true intimacy for a romp in a dark, empty unit. Taking for granted the opportunities for a real connection and the freedom they had with their agile bodies. They simply disgust me.*

With a twist of his wrist, Vader snapped Dax's neck using the force. Kimm, the nurse, was shrieking uncontrollably as her boyfriend collapsed on top of her.

Vader casually exited the room, showing the storm troopers just how replaceable they were to him — in devastating contrast to Anakin's relationship with his clone troopers. As for the nurse, Vader presumed that the trauma of a dead man inside her was enough to teach her a lesson.

Taul then rushed to Kimm's aid, who was shivering, trapped under Dax.

Barely getting over the shock, he helped lift his friend's dead weight off of her.

He placed the sheet over Kimm, covering her up, as he took a moment to mourn his friend, unable to wrap his head around just how heartless Vader was.

"And he looked up at his father and brother, and revealed that he had hid the ball all along." Obi-Wan read before closing the book. He turned to Luke and Leia who were cuddled up with a blanket on either side of him on the couch.

"So what did you think?" He asked

"Ugh." A 10 year old Luke groaned. "Uncle Ben, does everything have to be a lesson?"

"Yes, everything." He stated emphatically. "The universe is always sending a message. And we have to listen."

"I," Leia interjected confidently, "think that if it were me, you'd never find the ball."

She shot Obi-Wan a cheeky smirk, causing him to smile.

"I don't doubt that." He grinned before turning to Luke "And you?"

"...It's kinda sad." Luke muttered.

"Sad?" Obi-Wan cocked an eyebrow. "Why?"

"It took him this long to make peace." Luke huffed. 'He was holding the ball hostage — refusing to let them play without him. . .just because of one silly fight with his dad.' He shook his head. "It was a waste of time."

Obi-Wan sighed. "He was angry. But he learned patience, understanding, and then he found peace."

Luke remained silent, his eyes glazing over the blanket, as Obi-Wan continued. "You see, a father knows when he's holding on too tight, and when to let go. When someone is angry, there's nothing you can do. . .you must let them cool off."

Leia's eyes raised, inquiring: "What if they don't come around?"

Obi-Wan's eyes now stared ahead, as he began to pick at his beard. "...you practice patience, understanding and. . .you hope for peace."

Later that evening, as the twins headed off to their respective bedrooms, Obi-Wan decided to check on Luke.

"You seem bothered by the book." He spoke, closing the door behind him.

"I don't care." Luke whined with a shrug.

"Luke." Obi-Wan could see right through his arms-folded, defiant demeanor.

"What?" The boy groaned. And Obi-Wan took a seat at the end of the bed, patiently waiting for him to express himself.

Luke took a breath, letting go of his defensiveness. "Everyone takes it for granted, having a father. Like it isn't important. Like it doesn't affect everything, everyday, wherever you go, whatever you do." He huffed. "...Everyone has one so they don't care — until they don't."

"Yeah." Obi-Wan nodded with graceful empathy. "That's how it is sometimes. We don't always see what's in front of us."

Luke's eyes lowered to the ground. Obi-Wan observed him as the silence washed over them. His eyes searched his, trying to gauge what he was thinking.

And after a thoughtful pause, Luke finally allowed his vulnerability to seep through. "...she never talks about him."

And Obi-Wan realized what all of this was about.

Obi-Wan wondered how to handle this. This was really a conversation for Padme to have but it was clear Luke couldn't talk to her about this.

Obi-Wan eventually replied with a mournful sigh. "It's. . .hard for her too."

It's hard for all of us.

*And I've been a fool and I've been blind
I can never leave the past behind
I can see no way, I can see no way*

*I'm always dragging that horse around
Our love is pastured, such a mournful sound
Tonight I'm gonna bury that horse in the ground*

"They're asleep." Obi-Wan said as he headed into the living room.

"Thanks." Padme expressed her gratitude with a warm smile before heading over to the couch.

Obi-Wan made his way to join her.

"They've been asking about him." He noted.

And Padme fell silent. He didn't have to look at her to imagine the despair on her face.

"...what do you tell them?" She spoke, eventually, finding her words.

"The highlights." He shrugged hopelessly. And still she was quiet.

Obi-Wan finally turned to look at her. "They want to know him, Padme." He urged softly.

Her lip stiffened, letting out a slow breath. "Obi-Wan, don't start." She pleaded with a groan.

"You ought to talk to them." He pressed, and Padme grew impatient, fearful.

"—and tell them what?" She snapped. "That he left us? That he killed himself in search of power?! That he destroyed it all, sucking the light out of everything in the galaxy, including himself...?"

She got up abruptly and began to head over to the kitchen, searching for a wine glass.

And this was why Obi-Wan never wanted to broach the subject. None of them had fully recovered but Obi-Wan was the only one honest with himself.

"You spent three years married to him." Obi-Wan's voice was almost as irritable as hers as he followed her. "And yet you're holding onto one dark night, allowing it to keep you there. That's no way to go through life."

"Well, it kinda dampens the other memories slightly." She mocked derisively as she uncorked a bottle to pour herself a drink.

"Memories like them?" Obi-Wan gestured over to the kids' bedrooms. She seethed, resenting him for even including them in this conversation. "They were born out of love. Before the dark times. That's what you should be reminding them of."

"Do you think I'm proud of this?" She glared. "I'm not. I didn't want this for them! You think it never occurred to me what kind of life I wanted to give them?!"

She took a moment to steady her breathing, fighting back tears. "But I *can't*. . . I'm not the same anymore. I'm not the mother I thought I'd be. I know it, okay?!"

She wiped her tears fiercely trying to fend off her pain. She eventually plopped herself on the bar stool. Sitting there quietly, her quavering breaths now slow as the tears dried up. "I know it. I don't *need* you to remind me." She drawled.

"What a shame." Obi-Wan shook his head. "The Padme I knew had so much fight in her. And she never gave up her grace, her femininity or her warmth to use it. Hope you find it again."

He walked out, leaving her consumed with her thoughts.

The next day, Padme took the time to assess the way things had been going, realizing that Obi-Wan was right. She needed to make a change. It's been a decade and she was just getting by, not really living. And while she was always nurturing and present with her children, she hadn't allowed herself to be vulnerable around them, as if that was a way to protect them. But now it was clear that her behaviour was more harmful than helpful.

"Luke, Leia, dinner!" She called for them to join her at the dining table.

"Hmm." Leia grinned. "It's good."

"You like it?" Padme perked up, glancing at each of them.

"Yeah." Luke nodded.

As she watched them gobble up their food, looking at their angelic faces, she could see Anakin in them even though she never wanted to admit it. She could never bring herself to accept the past.

She rested her elbows on the table, taking a deep breath. "...This was the first meal I ever cooked for your dad."

Both kids looked up at her abruptly in disbelief. She always changed the subject when the topic of their late father came up, making them refrain from talking about him.

"It was a disaster." She lightly chuckled. "But he pretended it wasn't." The memory left her a little sorrowful but she let it pass.

Her eyes remained on her plate as she contemplated that thought. "But. . .I practiced my culinary skills and. . .eventually I got better at it."

Albeit curious, both of them continued to eat their food, almost afraid that any acknowledgement of their father would have their mother revert back to avoidance.

"Look," She finally proclaimed, "I know I've made it difficult for you to bring this stuff up with me. And I'm sorry." She uttered earnestly. Looking into their eyes, hers displaying quiet regret.

"But," She regained her composure, trying to take a leap forward. "I'm gonna try talking about it. . .and maybe, eventually, get better at it."

Her imploring eyes searched theirs.

"I'd like that." Leia shot her a warm smile, allowing Padme to release a sigh of relief.

"Me too." Luke agreed — and Padme reached out to squeeze their hands, with a heartfelt smile.

*Looking for heaven, found the devil in me
But what the hell, I'm going to let it happen to me*

*And it's hard to dance with the devil on your back
And given half a chance, would I take any of it back
It's a fine romance, but it's left me so undone
It's always darkest before the dawn*

Shake it Out — Florence & The Machine (Glee version)

3. Keep Breathing

Keep Breathing

Obi-Wan tossed and turned in his sleep, haunted by familiar ghosts — guilt, regret, fear, shame.

Fiery flashes of Anakin's face appear over and over again, and no matter which way he turned in bed, he was forced to watch him burn.

It seemed like the sun's light would never return as his heart remained buried under that unforgiving night.

He spends his days filled with regret, his nights struggling to forget.

It's true what they say, you either live fully, truly, honestly, or you live in life's ruins, and your ghosts are never set free.

It was as though the ghosts pried his eyes open in his sleep, forever forcing him to face his failures. They would never give him the gift of placidity. He would always pay for his blindspots... until he set things right.

*The storm is coming but I don't mind
People are dying, I close my blinds
All that I know is I'm breathing now*

"Luke, wake up." Obi-Wan gave him a little nudge.

Luke's eyes flickered open. He groaned as he stretched his arms up. "What time is it?"

"Just get up." Obi-Wan gently urged as he helped him out of bed and took him outside.

"Where are we going?" Luke rubbed his eyes, glancing around. Wondering why his uncle took him out into the garden.

"Here." Obi-Wan placed his hand in his pocket to pull something out.

"That's a — a lightsaber!" Luke gasped.

"Not just any lightsaber." One corner of Obi-Wan's mouth turned upwards. "Your dad's." He seemed just as excited to hold this weapon again. It had been so long since he used one.

Luke took the lightsaber and began twirling it around.

"It's time I showed you how to use it." Obi-Wan confirmed, watching him.

“But,” Luke paused with hesitation. “mum will—”

“—Let me worry about her.” Obi-Wan advised “For now, this’ll just be our little secret.”

Luke peered up at him, raising an eyebrow. “What about Leia?”

“You tell Leia, and come nightfall all of Naboo will know.” He chuckled, and Luke’s focus returned to the laser sword.

“We’ll tell them in due time.” Obi-Wan spoke softly, pretty much to himself as he observed Luke’s skill.

“Padme, you got a minute?” Obi-Wan stood there in the middle of the living room, watching Padme rush from one corner to the next, tidying up.

“Not really. I’m supposed to take Leia to the market. She needs new shoes.” She brushed past him.

“I think it’s best I do that.” He inserted

Padme finally stopped prancing around. “Obi-Wan—”

“*Just* to be safe.” He assured

“Fine.” She sighed. He thought he detected a slight eye roll. But instead he was met with warm gratitude. “Thanks.”

He offered her a subtle, polite nod.

“You know,” She began as she sunk onto the couch. “It was nice for the kids to have you here last night... Maybe, instead of going back and forth to the house, you could. . .stay.”

“Here?” He asked, now joining her on the sofa.

“You did all the time when they were little.” She added naturally

His eyes crinkled at the edges as he shot her a faint smile. “You needed me a lot more then.”

She gazed up at him, her soulful eyes saying it all, making sure he knew what he meant to them. And her lips curved into a smile. “We’ll *always* need you.”

“Mum!” Luke called as he came running down the stairs. “I’m gonna be in the garden for a bit.”

“Okay.” Padme replied from the couch, looking over her shoulder.

Without thinking, he raised his hand up to the door, practicing using the force to open it.

Padme did a double-take once she figured out what he was doing.

Her eyes widened as she sucked in a quick breath. “What is that? What are you doing?!”

Luke jumped at the sound of his mother's firm voice.

"Uh—" He fidgeted

"Did Uncle Ben teach you that?" She fretted, charging towards him.

"Mum, it's just a bit of fun." He spoke cautiously.

"I don't care what it is. You're not doing that in this house." She warned. She then turned away from him, storming into the kitchen.

Luke huffed, visibly annoyed at her as he walked out.

She hated herself for the outburst. She used to be a lot better at controlling her emotions — particularly her fears. She could barely remember the great negotiator she once was. How diplomatic she was. She was now in a state of constant worry, chronic stress. And sometimes it was just easier to shield them the outside world — well, easier for *her*.

Obi-Wan and Leia arrived home moments later. Leia ran over to her mother proudly displaying her new shoes.

"They're perfect." Padme praised, gazing at her daughter from her delicate braids to her whimsical smile, doing her best to match her enthusiasm once Leia caught her gaze. "Why don't you join your brother in the garden, I'll be there in a minute."

Leia headed out to show Luke her new shoes.

Obi-Wan looked fondly as she ran off, only to be taken aback by a stern Padme, sitting on the couch, arms folded, waiting until her daughter was out of earshot.

"How long have you been teaching Luke about the force?" She asked in a chiding tone.

Obi-Wan exhaled, bracing himself — not too keen on having this conversation.

"I thought I made myself perfectly clear." She scolded

He gradually made his way over to her, and sat on the armchair beside her. "It's time, Padme. He's ready... We both agreed—"

"—No, you agreed." She interrupted. "I said I don't want my kids involved."

"He is our only hope." He defined.

"He is my son *first*." She warned sharply. "Before he is anything to any of you."

"I'm sorry." He sighed, allowing for a thoughtful pause. "I'm sorry I went behind your back. And I'm sorry I didn't talk to you about it."

He now leaned back, crossing his legs. "But most of all, I'm sorry that you're afraid. And I'm *sorry* but I won't let your fear get in the way of Luke's destiny."

Padme shot him an icy glare. "Obi-Wan." The way she said his name cut like a razor-sharp blade, he could practically feel her tensing up, but he refused to back down on this one.

“You can’t let your fear about what happened to Anakin poison your mind.” He got up, cutting her off before she could say anything else. “We already know how that song ends.”

“Mum!” Luke came running into the house from the garden, out of breath, his eyes wide like he had seen a ghost.

“What? What is it?” She rushed over to him, examining his head and arms, making sure he was alright.

“Leia’s gone!” He cried.

“What?! What do you mean?” Padme fretted

“I went to get my skyhopper and when I came back, she was gone!” Luke exclaimed.

A wave of fear washed over Padme’s face as she gasped. Obi-Wan’s eyes darted rapidly from the boy to the window before they both raced out of there.

Padme ran out into the garden first, screaming Leia’s name at the top of her lungs. Her heart heavy, her chest tight, as she began to panic.

Rushing from one side of the yard to the other, trembling as her worst fear was realized. Obi-Wan covered the other ends of the garden, calling Leia’s name in between Padme’s screams.

“She’s gone!” Padme cried, anxiously turning to Obi-Wan. And he glanced around, worriedly. His own breath now mirroring the shaky inhalations coming from Padme.

They both ran out into the open field, desperately searching for her, as Luke followed — having difficulty concentrating as he grew more and more frightened regarding his sister’s whereabouts.

He nervously looked up at his mother and Obi-Wan, whose voices had become muddled as they called Leia over and over again. It started to sound like an echo as his mind began to tune out, not wanting to believe this was real.

*I want to change the world — instead I sleep
I want to believe in more than you and me
But all that I know is I’m breathing
All I can do is keep breathing
All we can do is keep breathing
Now*

Obi-Wan grabbed his lightsaber, attaching it to his belt, ready to leave. He took a quick glance at Padme, who was slouched hopelessly on the couch, her eyes glazed over the TV.

“I found a ride.” He imparted gently. “I’m heading there now.”

But Padme was silent.

He headed over to her, getting a better look at her. She was barely there. Her melancholic eyes devoid of hope. Her heart couldn't take another tragedy.

"I'll get her back." He promised. But Padme's eyes remained loosely on the TV.

"It's Mon." She pointed out, her voice a mere breath, now quiet and croaky from all her prior crying. She watched her former colleague call out the Empire at the senate conference for restricting their liberties in the name of 'safety and security.' "She's fighting back."

A fatigued Padme released a lazy exhale as each pod began to turn off their lights — almost every senator opposed Mothma's speech. "No one is listening to her. And yet she's still fighting."

Obi-Wan turned off the TV, causing Padme to sit up, surprised. He knew it did her no good to sit there, listening to bad news, hoping for some information about her daughter.

"You were right." She eventually spoke, not even bothering to argue at this point. "As much as I hate to say it. You need to train Luke."

Now that she was forced to be present, tears began to cloud her eyes. "The best way to protect those kids. . . is to teach them to protect themselves."

Obi-Wan sat down beside her, placing an arm around her shoulder. "Padme... I'm going to bring Leia back. I promise."

She wiped her tears with the back of her hand — she was sick of crying. "I'm going with you."

"No." He refused. "You need to stay with Luke."

"I have to do *something*!" She yelled, begging for a sense of control over the situation. "I can't just sit here!"

She now stood up, straightening out her wrinkled clothes with her hands. "I'm going to Coruscant."

"Padme, no." He followed her as she began to roam about impatiently.

He grabbed her arm to stop her from moving.

"Obi-Wan, I've been hiding for long enough." She shrugged. Her voice sounded fed up, brittle, like she was on the verge of breaking down. 'Watching Mon up there. . . I should be there!' She hurriedly sniffed. "I should be pushing back against the Empire... I spend every night praying for a future that I'm not even willing to fight for!"

She looked at him hopelessly, her face stained with disappointment — mainly in herself. Blaming herself for her missing daughter because she knew... she knew it was intentional. They both knew. They could feel it.

Whoever took her may not know how important Leia is, but nothing around here gets done without the Empire's say so.

"Padme, listen to me." He urged. "You need to stay off Palpatine's radar."

“No!” She cried. “What good is hiding?”

“They have my baby girl.” She blubbered. Her eyes were painful to look at, she felt completely defeated. “They don’t even know who Leia is and yet they found her anyway.”

She took a moment to catch up with her own breath, wiping her tear-stained cheek. “If they want to find me, they will.” She realized. “At least out there I’ll have an idea of what’s going on.”

“Just let me get Leia first.” He pleaded desperately. “Stay put until then. And I promise I will help you do what you need to do. We will fight together.”

He placed his hands on either side of her, holding her arms in place. “Just. . .for now, let’s do things my way. We need to get you and Luke out of here in case they come back.”

Padme seemed to be calming down as she started to snivel slower. “...I guess I could knock on my sister’s door. Give her the shock of her life.” She added with false amusement.

“No.” Obi-Wan shook his head. “It’s better that everyone in Naboo still thinks you’re dead. Just in case someone goes sniffing around for answers.”

Padme grew restless. “*What* then?” Agonized by the uncertainty. She needed something to do — something that made her feel productive.

Obi-Wan took a moment to gather his thoughts. “I have an idea.”

“Hello.” A slightly nervous Padme spoke, holding her son’s hand, as the door opened.

And they were met with an awkward yet friendly smile from Beru Lars.

All that I know is I’m breathing
All I can do is keep breathing
All we can do is keep breathing
All we can do is keep breathing...
Now

Keep Breathing — Ingrid Michaelson

4. Bad Guy

Bad Guy

*Sleeping, you're on your tippy toes
Creeping around like no one knows
Think you're so criminal*

*Bruises on both my knees for you
Don't say thank you or please
I do what I want when I'm wanting to
My soul? So cynical*

The Fifth Brother practically groaned to himself when he saw Reva dragging an unwilling child into an interrogation room.

"Reva, what are you up to?" He hissed, closing the door behind him. Reva grabbed Leia's shoulders, pushing her to sit down in a chair.

"Just securing the bait." She replied, handcuffing Leia's wrists to the armrests of the chair.

"Bait?" He raised an eyebrow.

"Mmhm." Reva nodded, standing up once Leia was securely tied. "I followed the tip we received from Naboo." She casually added.

"You didn't." He said gruffly, shaking his head — irritated by her nonchalance.

"And there the Jedi was." Reva uttered reflectively. "Out in the open at a market. . .with her." She pointed at a frustrated Leia who was trying to wriggle out of the handcuffs.

"So," Reva continued, forcing Leia to lean back. "I followed them to some lake house and. . .let's just say, an opportunity arose."

The Fifth Brother's eyes skimmed over the agitated little girl who seemed to be concealing her fear very well. His eyes shifted back to the the Third Sister. "Reva, you've gone too far this time."

"This will bring him to us." She stressed.

"Who is this kid?" He was growing restless, tired of Reva's impulsivity.

"Doesn't matter." She sighed. "All that matters is she's tied to him."

She started walking across the room to sit opposite Leia, interlacing her hands behind her head once she sat down.

“You have got to stop this fixation with Kenobi.” He said sternly. But Reva remained silent. Leia’s eyes darted from Reva to the man, trying to stay calm.

The Fifth Brother eventually broke into chuckle, realizing what this was likely about.

“I get it.” He sneered. “You think this’ll get *him* to notice you.”

Reva exhaled — a loud, sharp breath — clenching her fist as she stood up. She turned away from him, finding a distraction, fiddling with equipment.

And the Fifth Brother could feel the tension, knowing he got to her.

“It won’t.” He drawled, creeping up behind her, aware that his breath on the back of her neck irritated her.

She swung back around, facing him. Her vicious eyes staring at him with firm conviction — considering his remark a demeaning insult.

“I don’t do things for *him* or anyone else.” She roared.

The Fifth Brother scoffed, knowing her ferocity was digging her own grave, and he proceeded to leave her to it, tutting as he left the room.

“Why don’t we just cut to the chase. . .Looma, was it?” Reva spoke once the Fifth Brother left the two of them alone.

“Yes.” Leia muttered.

“You see,” Reva sat back down in the chair opposite her, resting her elbows on the table between them. “I have a little bit of a problem. I sent quite a few bounty hunters to your residence and no one was there. So maybe we can make a deal here. You tell me where Kenobi could’ve flown off to and I’ll set you free.”

After a brief moment of reflection, Leia tilted her head slightly.

“No you won’t.” She breathed out. “You want him to come here. So you need me *here*.”

Reva struggled to hide her impatience.

“This will all go a lot smoother if you cooperate.” Her lips firmed into an unyielding line. And Leia could sense a threat.

“I’m not afraid of you.” Leia spoke as solidly as she could. “My mother said anyone who works for the Empire doesn’t deserve your fear. Just your pity.”

And Reva snickered. “Your mother’s a fool.”

But before they could say another word, they heard quite a commotion coming from outside the door. Reva got up to inspect it, leaving Leia confused once she shut the door behind her.

The inquisitors gathered around behind the Grand Inquisitor when Vader arrived. Reva slid behind the Fifth Brother, who lightly chuckled at her derisively.

“You’re dead.” He sassed, clearly getting some pleasure out of watching Reva squirm.

“Shut up.” She whispered through gritted teeth.

And then she had that look in her eye, like she was once again ahead of everyone else. She pushed past the Fifth Brother with sly determination. “Watch and learn.”

He watched her approach the centre of the room. Reva, now standing before Lord Vader, did her best to hold her head high.

“My Lord,” She greeted him with a subtle bow, eager to make her announcement. ‘I have something that might be of value.’ She pointed to the unit. “In there is a little girl—”

“What would I want with a little girl?” The cutting acidity in Vader’s voice almost knocked her off balance. The intimidating dark lenses sliced through her and it took her a moment to find her footing. He almost rolled his eyes at the incompetence of some of these inquisitors.

“Well, uh — her name is Looma,” She quickly interjected. “and she is directly linked. . .to Kenobi.”

She could hear her own breath leave her mouth, anxiously awaiting his response. But the minute the name *Kenobi* left her lips, she sensed a shift in him. Suddenly his demeanor was less standoffish. Even though they were shielded behind a mask, she could tell his eyes were curious — she got his attention.

It was more than curiosity that had Vader hooked, it was a burning desire to finally *win*.

“I’m listening.” His raspy voice harsh in tone but vague in volume.

“She will lure him in.” She assured. Vader’s glare slid past her and onto the door she referred to earlier.

“Move.” He growled.

He pushed through the crowd, and they all frantically jumped out of his way.

He swung the door open.

*So you’re a tough guy
Like it really rough guy
Just can’t get enough guy
Chest always so puffed guy*

*I’m that bad type
Make your mama sad type*

I’m the bad guy

Leia's eyes widened as the shadow of the tall, dark figure covered her.

It felt like it took forever for her eyes to reach all the way up to his head. She sucked in a nervous breath, doing her best not to appear frightened — hoping she was doing a good job at disguising her trembling body.

Vader stood there, in a wide stance, observing her. Something felt odd. He couldn't quite put his finger on it, but the force was faintly surrounding her — there was something eerily familiar about the sensation he felt as he looked at her. Perhaps it was true — she could link him to Obi-Wan — physically and spiritually.

"How do you know Kenobi?" That dark, haunting voice finally spoke.

Leia swallowed a gulp. He could see in her eyes she was searching for something — an idea or a solution. It was strange but she wasn't as easy to read as most of their hostages. Something was protecting her. . .or causing Vader to hold back.

"I don't." She attempted to conceal a shaky breath under her quivering lips. "Perhaps that lady made a mistake." Her brittle voice tried to sound casual, but it was clear she was scared.

Vader took a step towards her, feeling her trepidation the closer he got to her.

"Why is he protecting you..." He thought out loud. Now standing right next to her, she was afraid to look up.

He bent down to look at her. And he could see her visibly shaking. She kept her eyes firmly on the table in front of her, praying he would go away.

"You're not a Jedi..." He studied her.

And in a flash, he raised his hand, using the force to probe into her mind. She screeched, squirming from the slight but sharp pain. It felt like he was giving her a migraine — a grating feeling, like the sensation you get from hearing nails on a chalkboard — like he was scratching through her temples.

"You're strong." He drawled, finally letting go — freeing her from his Force clutches. "But you're a liar." He growled quietly, walking around the table to stand opposite her.

"Your name's not Looma."

A tear streamed down Leia's cheek as she recovered.

"How do you know?" She spat.

"Your thoughts betray you. Your words don't match up. . .and you care deeply for Kenobi." He droned. He allowed himself to sit on the chair Reva occupied previously and looked at her curiously. "But why?"

"I don't." She sniveled. Her voice began to raise, as she grew afraid, anxious — impatiently wanting this to end. "I hardly know him! I'm not the girl you're looking for!"

"Well, if that's true, then no one's coming for you." He spoke with a cavalier attitude, leaning back on the chair. 'And I'll have to find some other use for you... Organ donation,' He callously pretended to ponder. "—might come in handy."

He observed his own metal hand, presenting himself with his typical brand of nonchalance. "Speaking of hands, we lose a lot of those around here."

"You can't touch me!" She blurted out. And his eyes returned to her. She struggled to steady her breaths. She could feel the burn from his fiery red lenses as he stared at her.

"When Obi-Wan gets here, you will all rue the day you brought me here!" She said in a panicky voice. "He is stronger than all of you! And he will destroy you! You'll never match the power of a Jedi!"

Vader got up abruptly, silencing her by flipping the table over, overcome with burning rage at the sound of any loyalty to Obi-Wan or the Jedi.

Leia halted, realizing the danger of her own words and wishing she hadn't spoken them.

His intense stare crippled her — interrupted only by Reva's entrance.

Reva's eyes rushed from the Sith Lord's to the little girl's, and she carefully intervened. "My lord." She affirmed hurriedly. "We cannot draw Kenobi in if she's harmed."

Vader's mechanical breaths echoed in the room, slowing down gradually, until they were quiet enough for him to walk away. He pushed past Reva, she could feel his fury — it filled the room, making everyone feel colder.

"Y-You saved my life." Leia quavered

"No." Reva breathed out, staring at the door through which Vader left. It took her by surprise — he was more riled up than she was earlier. "I saved mine."

Vader stormed into one of the units to be alone. Quivering with uninhibited rage.

He hated how easily the kid got under his skin. Or perhaps it was her faith in Obi-Wan that triggered him.

Never had he met anyone who dared to out-stubborn him. But it was more than the little girl. It was about who it was always about — Obi-Wan Kenobi.

The man responsible for his suffering. The man who sentenced him to life in his metal prison.

But it wasn't just about Obi-Wan winning a duel, no matter how violent the duel was. It was about what Obi-Wan represented:

All of Anakin's loss.

Every memory, every feeling, every desire, every attachment that Anakin ever had was gone because Obi-Wan *won*. And the longer it took Vader to find and defeat him, the weaker he felt. He was dying to settle the score and yet failing miserably.

Because, if he doesn't beat Obi-Wan soon, then Anakin's losses — the ones Vader buried deep within him — will come to the surface. And he couldn't handle that. He couldn't handle

remembering Anakin's pain and trauma. He couldn't bear to be him again, knowing what he lost. He vowed to never be him again.

Riddled with insecurity, he stood there, trying to catch his breath — even frustrated with that mechanical sound that came out of his mouth.

Suddenly, he felt two hands glide elegantly across his torso. He looked down and he recognized them instantly.

No. He bitterly pleaded with himself. It's not real.

He could feel her behind him, her head buried in his back — as high as she could reach, which wasn't very high.

She's not real... Don't let them get in your head.

But once again, that familiar feeling — the fear of not being in control — was stronger than his resilience.

Padme's body now slid over in front of him. He forced himself not to look. Staring straight ahead, over her head.

Her hands trailed up his chest.

It feels real... He could tell his mind was playing tricks on him.

*But it's **not**.*

Her hands reached up to cradle his face. He could tell they were warm, calming, like they used to be — even through the mask.

But still he refused to look at her, taking in slow, deep breaths.

She then reached to remove his helmet, and he flinched.

If it wasn't real... why does he feel so vulnerable?

She managed to remove his mask, placing it on the glass table in the room, and her fingers lingered on his cheek, caressing his scars.

Her warmth flooded his skin as her palm brushed against his jaw. He stood there, breathing heavily — his once frozen body now struggling to pull back from the brink. Her fingers continued to trace his face, memorizing his bone structure.

"Take it." She seductively whispered. Her soothing voice and the way she pressed her body against his made him feel dizzy. "Take what you really want."

He swallowed a gulp as her hands grazed down his back. He could feel her fingertips digging into him. And it felt so good to feel her burning caresses. The blend of pain and pleasure perfectly depicting his turbulent passion for her.

"It's all yours." She sang. And with a final, fierce exhale, Vader gave in.

His eyes finally landed on her, looking at her luscious hair, down her graceful curves, and back up to her ripe lips with irrational desire.

Rapidly, he grabbed her by the hair, tugging on it, urging her head backwards to force his lips on hers — his tongue plundered her mouth, taking what belonged to him.

His tongue massaged hers, claiming her with rough yet sweet strokes. Suddenly, he spins her around, bending her over the glass table, beside his helmet.

He then took a moment to gaze at her, as she waited for him. He began to pull up her skirt slowly, savoring the moment — pacing himself before his urges ran rampant.

He unzipped his trousers and took his place inside her, holding her down with one hand clasped on the back of her neck and the other gripping onto her hip.

He pounded into her, hard — furiously making love to her like he was punishing her — punishing her for not being real, for not being here, for not being *his* anymore.

A shattering moan escaped her lips as he thrustured into her. Lost in a whirlwind of intense sensations as he grunted out, feeling his flesh smack against hers as he held her in place.

The pulsations matched their heartbeats and sent a fiery and icy rush through his body, leading up to an overwhelming wave of ecstasy. The buildup now a throbbing rhythm that engulfed every part of his body, hitting every nerve, leaving him breathless, and his groans struggled to remain steady under her lascivious cries. He reached out, grabbing a fistful of her hair once more. The staggering tingling of the head of his organ demanding a climax — and to feel that sweet release.

And she was gone.

His shaky breaths filled the room. He stood there, panting, viciously glaring out into nothing, realizing he imagined it all.

Looking down at his now empty hand that he could've sworn felt the soft brushes of her hair strands only seconds ago, he was fuming. He was done with his mind turning on him. He raised said hand and, with a feral thrash, he dragged the glass table across the room, using the force to smash it against the wall.

*I like it when you take control
Even if you know that you don't
Own me, I'll let you play the role
I'll be your animal*

Pity the men I know

Bad Guy — Billie Eilish

5. Wild Wolves

AN:

Cheire: I know you wanted my last story to have a happy ending, sorry about that! :D While I haven't completely decided yet where this story will end (I'm waiting to see what feels and flows right) I will keep what you want in mind, and try not to kill them off this time :D xoxo

Wild Wolves

*As a friendly fire
Wasn't quite enough
You go and drop this
Bomb on us*

*The devil stood there
Drenched in sand
I'm here to give you a
Helping hand*

"I'm so sorry to hear what you've been going through." Beru sympathized, placing two coffees and a glass of water on the dining table. "But I just know Ben will get your daughter back."

"Thanks." Padme's voice was faint — her mouth hid behind the coffee mug she just took a sip from.

"You can stay here as long as you like." Beru assured with a friendly smile.

Padme offered a vague nod. Her eyes were warm, displaying the gratitude she couldn't bring herself to verbally express. "I appreciate that."

"So," Beru turned to the boy, keeping her tone upbeat. "Luke right? Tell me about yourself. Have any hobbies?"

Luke coyly shrugged, and Padme placed a comforting arm over his shoulder, knowing it was difficult for them to interact normally these days.

"He uh — he likes ships a lot." Padme informed, feigning excitement to get her son to relax.

“Really?” The corners of Beru’s mouth lifted. “Well, we’ve got a bunch of toys in the shed from when uh — well, they’re just sitting there collecting dust, dying to be played with.”

Luke offered her a shy but interested grin.

“That sounds nice, right?” Padme encouraged and Luke nodded.

“Go ahead!” Beru cheered. And Luke jumped up at the chance to go play.

Owen arrived home shortly after.

He was grumbling about the day he had as Beru got up to kiss him hello.

“Oh.” He spoke once he saw Padme sitting at the table. “Hi.”

“Hi,” She breathed out. “I’m Pad—”

“I remember.” He loosed off, plopping himself on the chair at the end of the table. He pulled off his boots, as Padme sat there awkwardly, waiting for Beru to return from getting him a drink from the kitchen. There was quite a contrast in the energies they gave off. Beru was warm and inviting. Owen wasn’t as friendly — perhaps they were the yin to the other’s yang.

“I’m sorry about your daughter.” He eventually added. Padme remained quiet but her eyes met him with appreciation.

The next morning, Padme and Beru sat there with their morning coffees, watching Owen teach Luke how to use the vaporators to gather humidity in the air, as Owen described how moisture farming works by using garden farming analogies.

“Owen has an unusual approach to teaching.” Padme lightly chuckled.

“Yeah.” Beru nodded as she gazed at her husband imparting his wisdom like a man who takes pride in fatherhood. She paused for a moment, admiring how Luke looked up at his uncle, hanging onto every word. “...He always says you don’t want a rose garden all year round. The fascination will fade over time. You gotta work for it to maintain its beauty. You need the weeds...” Beru may have casually let the words roll off her tongue, but Padme could see she really believed in Owen’s insight. “You spend a day picking out the weeds and, by the end, the roses’ll look that much brighter.”

Padme contemplated that thought, her eyes drifted off. “...I’ve been trying to give my kids a rose garden.” She pondered. “I should be teaching them to grow one.”

“Babe, have you seen my — oh.” Owen barged into the living room later that night. Padme was sitting on the couch with a glass of wine.

“Sorry Beru went to bed.” Padme answered.

“I should do the same.” He grunted out as he made his way to the armchair in the corner. “Been a long day.”

“...I really appreciate everything you’re doing for us, keeping Luke company, letting us stay.” She finally said — the words came out like a puff of smoke.

“Thank Beru.” He sighed, “She’s always been sentimental about family.”

There was an awkward silence. The only distraction was the faint sounds coming from the TV.

“I uh. . .I heard about your husband’s death a few years ago.” He mentioned after a beat. “I’m sorry.”

And Padme felt a cold shiver pass through her before repositioning herself on the chair. “Guess I should say the same to you. You and Anakin were basically related—”

“—No.” He cut her off. His voice a low gruff. “I hardly knew the guy.”

He rested his head back. “With Shmi gone, there’s really nothing connecting us.” He clicked his tongue, breaking into a bitter chuckle. “Never reached out once.”

Padme’s body closed up, her hands clinging onto her opposite elbows, feeling the discomfort in an otherwise comfortable chair. “Well — sometimes life just. . .gets in the way.”

“And some people are just cold.” He quipped.

Padme finally made eye contact. “Him. . .or you?”

He could sense a little playful mockery.

“Fair enough.” He grinned as his eyes leveled with hers — they exchanged a fonder glance now. Probably the first time he smiled at her during the two days she’s been here. “Guess it goes both ways.”

He let out a rough exhale, realizing he could’ve been a little warmer towards her. “You’re a guest in my house. The least I can do is be accommodating.”

*And the desert brought
News from the west
This could be your biggest test
Grab your gun and your survival kit
We’re gonna get through the very worst of this*

“The boy’s soft.” Owen grumbled as he got into bed that night.

“Owen, come on. You like him and you know it.” Beru teased lightly, rolling over to face him.

“Did I say I didn’t like him? I just said he’s soft.” He shrugged, propping up his pillow to rest his back on it as he sat up. “He needs a father figure.”

“He has Ben.” She interjected.

Owen scoffed. "Yeah 'cause he did such a bang-up job with Anakin."

"That's not fair." Now Beru pulled herself up to lean against the headboard. "We don't know what went on."

"You're right." He huffed, rubbing his eyes. "Just pisses me off. . .what that guy did. Someone should've been able to control him."

"Well, you remember what Shmi used to say, *you can't tame wild wolves, but you can try to understand them.*"

"Nah." He shook his head, going off. "That kid was mad, bad and dangerous to know. The kid she described was *not* the person we met."

"Well — think about it, you grew up with his mother's love. He didn't."

"Padme probably made up for that. If she overcompensated as much as she does with the boy." He derided. "...Look at the mess he left his kids. They don't deserve that... And what are Ben and Padme doing? Dragging them around, providing them no sense of stability."

"Owen." She warned gently. "Owen, it's not our place."

"Like hell it isn't. That's Shmi's grandson. And she was like a second mother to me..." He let out a deep breath, letting the tension exit his body. "Those kids were born into one of the most broken homes, barely have enough of one parent. . .when there are many couples out there, dying to give their all."

"Like us." She added weakly, almost hurt by his words. "Couples that plan for a future, buy toys that their unborn baby will never see?"

Owen, realizing it wasn't just his own feelings at stake, turned to his wife with apologetic mindfulness. "Oh Beru. I'm sorry."

She fidgeted. "You say it doesn't bother you that I lost the baby. . .but the way you're reacting to them—"

"—was insensitive." He stated firmly, wrapping his arm around her to pull her in for a hug. "...If it's in the cards, it'll happen. We'll keep trying. And if not, it's okay." He soothed, kissing her forehead. "Really... *You* are my family."

Padme lied awake in the guest room, struggling to get some sleep after tucking her son into bed. It was difficult to stay positive for Luke when Obi-Wan wasn't answering his comlink — and all she can think about is whether her daughter is safe.

She was very grateful for Owen and Beru, and the interest they took in their nephew. Owen was a little rough around the edges but he was a good man. And a good man who isn't necessary always nice is far better than a nice man who wasn't necessarily good. Luke was lucky enough to have a truly kind uncle and aunt, even if Owen has made it clear he wasn't very fond of Anakin. Perhaps it was brotherly rivalry. Obi-Wan and Anakin had that relationship at times.

Maybe Anakin was the problem. He didn't have their discipline. Owen and Obi-Wan both pride themselves on putting in hard work, exhibiting self-control and sacrificing for something bigger than them — for Obi-Wan it was the republic, for Owen it was his family.

Anakin was far more reckless, overindulgent — dare she say, selfish. *And you know what they say, it's okay to be a dangerous man. But it's not okay if you're a dangerous man who can't control it.* He wasn't cautious, he hated any form of limitation. He was always going to test the boundaries anyone else put forth. And she loved the wildness in him, even at times when she knew better.

As she heard Owen's grunts and Beru's moans through the wall as they made love that night, Padme wondered whether she should've opted for the simple life. Clearly they were fulfilled, in love, humble, happy... They didn't demand more or crave more other than to get what they earned. And they appreciated the life they built themselves.

And while Padme was never one to fall into the trap of greed, she was enticed by all the excitement surrounding Anakin.

Her whole life she was an avid rule-follower, she held herself to high standards. Integrity meant everything, and she never wanted to compromise her values. But she had spent her whole life being the adult in the room. Any adolescent rebelliousness was reserved for her job, finding new and creative ways to serve and protect her people, her planet. It was all she knew.

The idea of having any personal passions was an after-thought. And when she did ever think about settling down, she imagined it would be with someone like the men she knew in Naboo. The diplomats, the politicians, the prim and proper, refined men that come from "good families" as they called it (usually meant wealthy) — the ones all the good girls married — the cookie-cutter molds. And it wasn't very appealing to her. Padme had much more romantic ideals than to be enticed by money or lifestyle.

She just wanted something more out of life — something different, authentic, intimate. She craved adventure. In higher societies, like the one she worked in, marriage looked like a transaction, an agreement devoid of passion. And she didn't want that. She wanted what her parents had, what Owen and Beru had — to be married for no reason other than mutual love and respect.

She should've known her and Anakin's love would never be truly fulfilled. All the signs were there and yet she jumped in with both feet, allured by his wild heart leading hers astray. She took the risk and explored the unknown — probably romanticized it more than she should have. But so few know what it feels like to be loved by someone whose flame burned so bright, and what it feels like to be on the receiving end of that burning passion.

Anakin was hardly a safe choice. You never knew what you were going to get from one day to the next with him. And she had to admit that Owen was right, sometimes he was so cold. When he hated, he hated hard.

But when he loved, he loved harder. And she remembered it vividly, like it was yesterday.

There's something to be said about a dangerous man whose hands had enough strength, power and aggression in them to choke, crush and kill another and yet could handle her with such care, delicately worshipping her.

She reluctantly pictured him hovering over her. His rugged handsomeness, his soft, mischievous smirk that formed the most knee-buckling smile lines, and his delicately defined bone structure made her weak. His dark blonde fringe beautifully fell across his forehead, his piercing blue eyes gazed at her with gentleness yet intensity — from his eyes comes honesty, a meaningful promise that he will nurture her as he seizes her.

He begins unbuttoning her blouse, letting it fall to her sides, exposing her breasts. His fingers ever so gently tracing every edge and curve of her body. The subtlety of his touch left a palpable trail — it was almost too much. She closed her eyes as an exhale left her lips in a dim haze. The sound of her own breath surrendering was deafening.

He could perfectly balance rough and gentle rhythms — sometimes he possessed her fiercely. He grabbed her thighs, spread her legs for his writhing hips to wriggle in between, positioning her the way he wanted, taking ownership of her. But then, he caressed her gently. His hand lightly cradled her neck like he was shielding the most vulnerable, sensitive parts of her from harm, as he stole kisses.

When he loves you and his red hot fiery sun shines on you, you really feel it — you are the most important person in the room, and his blind obsession makes him completely, loyally devoted to you. But when he's mad, the light is gone... you're left out in the cold — he can cast one hell of a shadow.

He let her know she was his — and only his — and his rageful passion makes her yearn to be his, to be engulfed in his fire, to be made love to the way only he knew how. He made her want no one but him. The tip of his throbbing erection barely slides over her entrance in between her legs, teasing her, tempting her. Her fingers now splayed across his back, clawing into him. He had her pleading, crying, begging for him to take her.

She would always succumb to him. Not even wild wolves in Tatooine could get her to stop. Because asking to be immersed in the pleasure that only he could give was the same as asking to feel alive.

So give her danger, give her risk, because she'd rather give into him and all the uncertainty that came with it, than to have picked a different path, a safer, stable road, and know exactly what life would look like from here on out.

Maybe that's what this memory is all about — to remind her that she still has some of that fire in her, to believe her daughter will be home soon, to fight against the Empire, to build the future she wants for her children. She was never one to run away from a challenge before and she certainly wasn't going to back down now.

Although, as far as Anakin goes, now, after 10 years of loneliness (10 years with the absence of the man with whom she shared all the sparks in the world) she worshipped and cursed the day she married him.

*And my soul is a dark place
But I know your love
I know your love*

*And my soul is a lonely one
And I'm not alone
I'm not alone*

*Wild wolves always stare me out
I'm not running
I'm not running away*

Athlete — Wild Wolves

6. Anti-Hero

AN:

Selenese: So happy to see you back! I can't wait for them to meet either! XOXO

ThunderOfDeath97: I can see you love Anakin a lot, and I love the passion you have — I love Anakin too! But, you know, we have to understand the perspective of all the characters not just Anakin's. They are trying to piece things together and make sense of everything that happened. It's not all black and white — there's a lot of nuance there. So we should show them the same courtesy you show Anakin, right? :D

Anti-Hero

Leia gasped as the door rattled until she saw Obi-Wan breaking through.

"Uncle Ben!" She cried

"Leia!" He breathed out a sigh of relief and rushed to uncuff her wrists.

"There are bad people here." She spoke nervously. "And they're looking for you." She warned but Obi-Wan didn't need her to warn him, he was well aware.

"Come on." He signaled gently. "Let's just get out of here."

They were just about to leave when two stormtroopers and an imperial officer barged in.

The stormtroopers ordered Obi-Wan to put his hands in the air but just as they aimed their blasters at him, they were shot in the back of the head by the imperial officer — much to the surprise of Obi-Wan and Leia.

"We need to get going." The woman instructed.

"Who are you?" He cocked an eyebrow

"Tala." She rushed. "I'll explain later. You just. . .put on his uniform." She pointed over to the stormtrooper lying dead on the floor.

Her eyes then searched the space, looking for a solution. She grabbed a trolley, and gestured for Leia to get in. Leia glanced at Obi-Wan who hesitantly nodded.

Obi-Wan threw his cloak over Leia, placing the other stormtrooper helmet on her. And they began to sneak out.

Managing to get past most of the guards wasn't difficult — everyone seemed to be minding their own business. It wasn't until they were about to head onto the ship, that Tala had waiting for them, that someone took notice.

Reva rushed over, urging the troops to aim their guns at the ship.

Vader came out upon hearing the many gunshots. He turned to Reva, as the ship flew off, and could see she had failed.

“My lord—” She began but Vader waved her off.

“I’ll deal with you later.’ He warned before turning to his staff.” Prepare my ship!”

*I have this thing where I get older, but just never wiser
Midnights become my afternoons
When my depression works the graveyard shift, all of the people
I’ve ghosted stand there in the room*

Obi-Wan, Leia and Tala arrived on Mapuzo, and she guided them to a passageway that can keep them hidden until they acquire a ride home.

Vader and the inquisitors arrived shortly after, making it obvious to Tala that they followed them.

“He’s here.” She whispered, almost to herself.

“And if he’s after you. . .your chances of getting out alive are slim to none.”

“Who?” Obi-Wan asked, rushing over to see who Tala was spying on through the window.

“Vader.” She uttered.

Obi-Wan stepped back, like he needed to lean on the wall for a moment. He started to notice the cadence in his breaths — rapid, unsteady. His eyes widened, unable to come to terms with it. And his mind flashed back to that fateful night where he saw that holo-recording and Anakin accepting his sith name from Palpatine.

He can’t be alive. After all this time?

But he didn’t need to say anything — suddenly, he could *feel* him.

In an effort to avoid hyperventilating, and feeling a burning sensation in his chest, he took a look for himself.

And there he was.

Encapsulated in a black, metal suit. The mechanical breathing sounded so loud with all the villagers quiet. The entire village seemed to halt at his presence — frozen in fear.

Vader made his way down the road, eager to find Obi-Wan.

And just as Obi-Wan released another shaky breath, Vader stopped in his tracks. He could feel him *too*.

Vader glanced around, his red lenses darted from one side to the other, desperate to seize him. His eyes settled on a family — particularly the father. He raised his arm and, using the

force, his fingers wrapped around the father's neck, dragging him out into the middle of the road. This was met with gasps from the bystanders, and tears from the man's family — feeling hopeless to stop it.

Obi-Wan couldn't take it. He couldn't believe the viciousness he saw before his eyes. What was even worse was he couldn't do anything to help these innocent people. As a Jedi, that's what he's been trained to do his whole life. But if he did, he'd be putting Leia at risk. It all felt so wrong — to sacrifice one person for another.

The son of the victim ran out to save his father, but Vader snapped his neck — and everyone felt sick at that point. And Obi-Wan knew, Vader was sending him a message. This was about fathers and sons, the family dynamic, his relationship with Obi-Wan, and how ready Vader was to kill it.

Growing restless as his attempts to lure Obi-Wan out seemed futile, he continued to make his way down the path, grabbing any civilian to take his anger out on, in hopes that Obi-Wan would have to give in.

Dragging a lady out by the neck, Obi-Wan realized that Tala was right: there was little to no chance of them making it out alive.

Urging Tala to take Leia and go, Obi-Wan considered going out and putting an end to this.

Leia begged Obi-Wan to stay, refusing to leave him, as he and Tala tried to keep her quiet.

They were just about to reach the tunnel that led to the shuttle that will take them home but before they could make it, there he was.

Vader now stood before the three of them, and Leia cried out in terror, traumatized by the man in the black suit that hurt her when he infiltrated her mind.

There was no other option but to run out into the open land covered in sand.

*I should not be left to my own devices
They come with prices and vices
I end up in crisis
Tale as old as time*

There was quite a difference in their demeanors. Obi-Wan picked up Leia, and he and Tala ran out as far as they could. It didn't even dawn on him that he was protecting Leia from her own father. Vader seemed to walk steadily behind them. And Obi-Wan realized that running away was only going to get the three of them killed.

"Both of you, go." Obi-Wan urged breathlessly. "I have to face him."

Obi-Wan turned back around and was immediately met with Vader's stare. Leia screamed out but Tala grabbed her arm, rushing her over to the side.

“What have you become.” Obi-Wan’s forehead wrinkled, still trying to process it. His eyes wide in shock.

“What you made me.” He hissed. Vader glanced over at a trembling Leia and Tala.

“Babysitting?” Vader sneered, as he narrowed the space between him and Obi-Wan.

“Sure you want your little friend to watch you die?” His dry tone was followed by his red lightsaber igniting.

“Leia, run. Now!” Obi-Wan ordered and Tala took her hand and made a run for it — just as Vader aimed his laser sword at Obi-Wan.

Obi-Wan quickly ignited his own, feeling rusty, but he did his best to block Vader’s hit.

Obi-Wan struggled to keep up with the stamina Vader exerted. Vader didn’t seem to fight fair — always on the attack — always ready to use brute force, including punches with his metal hand.

After several lightsaber thrashes, Vader finally knocked Obi-Wan on the floor.

“You thought you could beat me?” He almost cackled.

He raised his sword once more, and Obi-Wan wondered whether he’d make it — he felt utterly defeated.

It wasn’t until he saw the blazing red light coming at him that he remembered his purpose — the twins — He remembered Yoda and their plan, and how the future of the galaxy hangs on this moment.

His back writhed in pain, as he put all his effort into blocking Vader’s lightsaber with his own, holding it up for as long as he could to keep Vader at a distance — he was almost blinded by the clashes of red and blue light.

Trying to summon the strength to defend himself, Obi-Wan finally managed to lift his leg, kicking Vader back in the crotch. He then used his lightsaber handle to destroy Vader’s breathing mechanism on his chest, slowing Vader down. And with one final slash, Obi-Wan aimed for his head, slicing a large chunk of Vader’s helmet.

Vader stumbled, trying to stand up straight, and Obi-Wan finally saw the man behind the mask.

Anakin.

*I wake up screaming from dreaming
One day, I’ll watch as you’re leaving
'Cause you got tired of my scheming
For the last time*

Obi-Wan felt his own heart stop. He knew Anakin was in the suit but he didn't quite register it until now — until he finally saw Anakin's blue eyes staring back at him. He was *really* in there.

"Anakin." He whispered, aghast.

Vader glared at him, trying to manage his distorted, irregular inhalations.

Obi-Wan began to tear up, feeling like a failure. How can brothers misunderstand each other so drastically?

"I'm sorry, Anakin." He whimpered. "For all of it."

Vader tensed up, filled with rage, especially at the sound of his former name. But what really upset him was that he hated him. He hated him so much — and he realized that the problem with that is it means there's still love there. Vader would rather not hate him. He'd rather be indifferent — then he wouldn't care to hate him at all.

But he knew he wasn't there yet. He had enough self-awareness to know that his anger ran the show. And he was angry as he looked at Obi-Wan's tears. He didn't want to see him cry. He wanted to beat him. He wanted it to feel good. He wanted the *win* to feel good — he would prove he was stronger, that his powers were unrivaled, that he survived the most violent death, and he wanted to relish in it.

But instead, he was met with Obi-Wan's pity. Pity! And Vader didn't want his pity.

"I am not your failure, Obi-Wan." He growled.

Obi-Wan was further brought to tears once he heard Anakin's true voice escaping the muddled sounds of his breathing device. It's been 10 years since he heard him speak.

"*You* didn't kill Anakin..." He rasped. "*I* did."

A deranged smile left his lips. He was adamant about being the one to take the power back. At least that's the way Vader saw it. Perhaps Anakin was relieving Obi-Wan of his guilt — but Vader refused to believe there was any Anakin left in him.

"He could come back." Obi-Wan eventually sniveled. "If you wanted him to."

He cautiously took a step closer. "It doesn't have to be like this."

His eyes leveled with Vader's, and for a moment he could've sworn there was a glimmer of hope in them.

"Be the man I believed you could be." His voice was gentle but almost desperate to reach out. "The man Padme believed you were—"

The sound of her name and the memory of the night that everything changed made Vader's blood boil. Every time he falls deeper into the dark side, it looks the same. It's always dark, indicating his fall from the light. There's a fire, the one that physically consumed him when he became Vader, and the one within him that drove him to seek more — more power, more freedom. And lastly, the dark side trap has you blinded by your own passion — you can't see anything other than what you want.

The dark side makes you believe it's freeing you. It appears to understand your inner self and lets you believe you can gain all the things you lust after.

But the roaring Mustafar fires wasn't the memory that stuck with him in this moment, it was the fire within, the first time he felt dangerously close to getting his heart's desires.

He could hear the crackling flames coming from the fireplace. The room was dark — the fire was the only source of light, leaving just a small window of opportunity to step into the light. Padme stood there in a black, leather corset and lace skirt with a metallic design pattern, sporting a jet collar necklace that perfectly depicted the chokehold they had on each other. He was going to get what he wanted even if he had to squeeze it out. The same way he seized her neck on Mustafar to silence her when she didn't do what he wanted her to.

He stood so close to her now. It was probably dangerous to be this close to her but he didn't care. It was all he could think about. He had to have her.

"W-we can't let one little kiss get in the way of reality." Padme reasoned but her resolve was cracking. She didn't feel so confident in her convictions now that she could feel the heat from his body hovering over her.

"This is real to me." He drawled, reaching up to cradle the side of her face. Her eyes fell closed at the touch of his hand on her cheek — but she soon snapped out of it.

"The reality is you're a Jedi and I'm a senator." She put her foot down but it didn't seem to click with Anakin at all, as his head tilted to one side, watching her mouth as she talked — getting lost in her.

"Padme, listen to me." He said in an urgent whisper. His hands lingered on either side of her face, making her knees weak. "I can't walk away now... You're in me and I'm in you whether we like it or not."

The sound of his raspy voice seared into her mind, she was struggling to resist his advances. With his mouth so close to hers now, and his breath on her lips, she could no longer remember why they were supposed to stay away from each other.

Before she could find her voice, his lips found hers. His tongue slipped into her mouth and she too found herself giving in to her darkest desires.

"Don't say her name!" Vader roared. "Don't you dare say her name to me."

"Prove her right." Obi-Wan insisted, hopefully. "I know you're in there."

"Don't you get tired of rooting for Anakin Skywalker?" Vader scoffed, rolling his eyes like he was bored of the subject. "I know I did. It's exhausting. . . so I destroyed him."

Vader was fed up with Anakin's fear — fear of failing, fear of abandonment, fear of a loss of control. And he realized: if you're tired of being afraid, make everyone afraid of you.

“Anakin is gone. I am what remains.” He paused. “And now I’m no longer burdened by his losses.”

Vader stumbled closer to Obi-Wan, his lightsaber in hand, making it clear the fight wasn’t over. “The same way I will destroy you. And you won’t bother me anymore.”

Obi-Wan searched his eyes. They weren’t blue anymore. They were sith yellow. Obi-Wan could feel his last shred of hope leaving his body, his face distraught, his eyes realized there were no more tears to cry.

“Then my brother is truly dead.” He said with a doleful shrug. “There’s nothing left to fight for...”

Obi-Wan shut off his lightsaber and began to walk away. It was over. There was nothing more he could do.

“Goodbye, Darth.”

As Obi-Wan walked away, Vader refused to let him go — physically and emotionally.

Vader came charging after him, unable to walk in a straight line but ready to attack nonetheless.

Obi-Wan noticed him coming toward him and hurried away. He didn’t have anymore fight in him.

“Obi-Wan.” Vader’s dreary voice and wheezing inhalations followed him.

But Obi-Wan managed to get on the shuttle in time as Tala helped pull him in.

“OBI-WAN!” Vader roared as the ship flew off.

He tried pulling it down using the force, and he almost did. The ship began to rattle as he held it back. But he was too damaged after their duel to regain the strength needed to pull it down completely.

They managed to escape, and Vader was left furious.

Pierced through the heart, but never killed

Did you hear my covert narcissism I disguise as altruism

I wake up screaming from dreaming

One day, I’ll watch as you’re leaving

And life will lose all its meaning

When they arrived home, Padme dropped to her knees as she held her daughter in her arms. Tears streamed down her cheek, relieved. She could breathe again.

She then hugged Obi-Wan, her face expressing all the gratitude possible — there weren’t enough words that could ever match him rescuing her daughter.

“Padme, there’s something I have to tell you.” Obi-Wan breathed out nervously.

“What is it?” She asked, but her attention was on her children hugging each other.

He looked at her so happy watching over her children, as they now interacted with Uncle Owen and Aunt Beru. It was the happiest he’d seen her in a long time.

“W—we can’t go back.” He cleared his throat. “We can’t go back to Naboo.”

She finally looked up at him and nodded. She didn’t care where they went, as long as her kids were safe.

And Obi-Wan watched her join them on the sofa.

And he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t tell her.

Obi wan couldn’t say what he should’ve said. He didn’t even know whether he should — it was clear there was very little of Anakin left, if any. He couldn’t bring himself to say the words...

Anakin is alive.

Vader’s eyes opened after being submerged in the bacta tank. He was still furious, full of anguish. It was one thing to fail at defeating Obi-Wan. It was a whole other thing for Obi-Wan to walk away and not believe Vader was worthy of fighting.

Vader let out an intense exhale through his breathing device — determined to never give up until he won.

*It’s me, hi
I’m the problem, it’s me
It’s me, hi
Everybody agrees*

*I’ll stare directly at the sun, but never in the mirror
It must be exhausting always rooting for the anti-hero*

Taylor Swift — Anti-Hero

7. Lost

Lost

*Dreams fight with machines
Inside my head like adversaries
Come wrestle me free
Clean from the war
Your heart fits like a key
Into the lock on the wall
I turn it over, I turn it over
But I can't escape*

Reva entered Vader's throne room, kneeling before him, ready to defend herself.

"My lord, I—" Her words were immediately silenced as he force-choked her in the air. He watched her struggle, her legs wriggling about, as he refused to accept that he is the one who let Kenobi slip through his fingers.

He couldn't bear to admit it to himself. He failed again. His blind rage, his arrogance, his obsessive passion for winning left him weakened by a strategic Kenobi.

And the only thing worse than that was his own mind. His mind constantly tormented him with his innermost fears when he was Anakin, and it still continued to do it now. That's the problem with a powerful mind — you can't control it when it turns on you.

So instead, he chose to punish her for it all. It was her initial plan and she failed to capture him after luring him in. And Vader really needed to take out his frustration on someone.

"I—" She croaked. And Vader loosened his grip on her throat through the force, giving her one chance to speak. "I put a tracker in the little girl's droid."

He let out a fierce breath, eventually lowering her down to the ground.

"I will handle this myself." He scowled, shooing her away with a flail of his hand.

Shortly after arriving at Padme's old apartment in Coruscant, Padme took a moment to appreciate her children being happy and healthy, as she watched them play on the carpet.

"I can't thank you enough." She began once Obi-Wan joined her on the couch.

Obi-Wan smiled to himself as his gaze settled on the children. "...I knew she'd be okay. They both will. The ball told me everything I needed to know."

Padme turned to face him, confused. “The what?”

“The Ball.” He repeated. “The book I read to them.”

Obi-Wan crossed his legs and leaned back on the couch, his fingers playing with his beard.

“Their responses to this book gave me all the insight I need. Leia’s response was,” He paused, chuckling to himself. “—analyzing how good the boy was at hiding the ball. She was gauging whether she could find a better way to do it. She’s extremely efficient. She’s ambitious, she’s fearless, impulsive, and ready for a challenge. She’s. . .like Anakin.” His eyes shifted as he said his name.

Padme allowed herself to finally embrace it. All the great things about Anakin were in her children. And it was no coincidence that Leia’s sassy remarks were inherited from her dad. “Don’t I know it!”

“And Luke,” Obi-Wan continued with a proud smirk. “—he was far more observant. He paid attention to the characters, particularly the father and son. He can gauge people’s emotions. He’s very compassionate and he’s an adventurer but. . .he always thinks before he acts. He takes his time to understand people and situations first before making a judgment call. He’s like you.”

Padme got a glimpse of her son’s bright blue eyes and she could see all of that. She could see his compassion, and how he was always full of hope even on the tough days. He’s the first one to apologize to his mother when he and his sister did something she didn’t approve of. Leia would be stubborn, trying to find a way out of it. But Luke would always choose peace — he’d always try to talk it out, finding a way to make things right.

“I uh — I went to see Mon and Bail.” Padme spoke after a moment’s reflection. “At the senate. Told them I’m staying. . .and gave Mon the money I got from selling the estate in Varykino.”

Obi-Wan released an empathic sigh. “I’m sorry you had to give up your home.”

“My parents believe it was sold anyway. This makes it true.” She shrugged.

“But the money could’ve helped you.”

“It is. It’s helping all of us.” She assured. Her voice sterner than it was before. “I told you, Obi-Wan, I’m not going down without a fight. Next time they come for one of my kids, I’ll be prepared. And I will do everything I can to rebel against the Empire. And one way is to help Mon fund an alliance to restore the Republic.”

Obi-Wan fidgeted in his seat. “I don’t know. I still feel uneasy... Your apartment is right in the middle of it all.”

“That’s the point.” She affirmed. “The one place you never look is right under your nose.”

Obi-Wan quickly came to the realization that it was pointless to argue with her. She had made up her mind long before they got here. And she was definitely set on taking her life back, and that included her home in Coruscant. But that wasn’t going to stop him from finding safer alternatives for housing.

“Hopefully we won’t have to stay in Coruscant for too long. I’ll be in Tatooine tomorrow. Owen said he’ll help us find a place big enough for the four of us.”

He got up and left the room, still consumed with the glaring truth that he hadn’t confessed yet. With Anakin alive, they were far safer in Tatooine than here.

He wondered when the right time to bring it up would be because, at some point, he knew he’d have to tell her. But every time he looked into Padme’s eyes, he was reminded that she’ll never get over him — and telling her the truth might just kill her.

*I don’t want them to know the secrets
I don’t want them to know the way I loved you
I don’t think they’d understand it, no
I don’t think they would accept me, no*

Vader was shocked to find out where the tracker led him. Stepping out onto the landing platform of his and Padme’s old apartment conjured up painful memories. He couldn’t ignore the sense of familiarity as he took a gander.

It all looked the same. The warm, homey shades of blue and beige — the colours were as vibrant as they were ten years ago.

It was awful standing there, he was afraid to head in. His head was clouded enough as it is, he didn’t need any more of Anakin’s feelings messing with him.

Why would Obi-Wan be here? He clenched his fist the more he thought about it. Was Obi-Wan hiding right under his nose the whole time? Why would he bring the little girl here of all places? Vader grew more and more irritated — was Obi-Wan taunting him?

“Obi-Wan!” He growled.

From the bedroom, Padme overheard the grating voice. She quickly shushed her children, trying to eavesdrop.

“Stay here.” She hurriedly whispered, discreetly grabbing her gun. “Don’t open the door.”

She closed the door behind her quietly. With her back pressed up against the wall, she glided through the hall, gun in hand, ready to shoot.

“Obi-Wan’s not here.” She finally made herself known, pointing her blaster at the tall, dark figure — as terrifying as the sight was in her house, she did a good job at disguising her fear.

Vader’s eyes locked with hers, and suddenly he felt like he couldn’t breathe. He couldn’t believe it. Scanning her eyes, her hair, her mouth, her body, blinking a couple of times, thinking his vision was poor or his mind was viciously lying to him.

He studied her intently as his sinister breaths sped up, trying to slow them down and figure out how she could be standing before him.

It was *her*. He could *feel* her again.

The towering man in the metal suit involuntarily took a step forward, and Padme felt a shortness of breath, which caused her fingers to tremble as she tried to maintain a steady grip on her blaster. Her elbows kept lowering, succumbing to her anxiety. Her heart raced, shackled by her fear — doing her best to swallow that fear to protect her family. Despite feeling overwhelmed with worry and dread, she mustered up the courage to aim her gun higher.

“Padme.” He rasped.

“How do you know my name?” She quivered in a panic. “What do you want?!”

He continued to walk slowly towards a fearful Padme. Her finger inches away from pulling the trigger.

And the gun went off. Vader quickly blocked the shot by igniting his lightsaber just in time. She kept on shooting but he caught them all.

Using the force, he stole the blaster out of her hand. Her shaky hands now empty, and all she could do was hesitantly look up at him — he was so close to her now.

He tossed the gun aside on the floor and with a twitch of his finger pushed it further away from them.

He was now standing right in front of her. His chest in her face — her eyes peering up at his helmet.

He still couldn’t make sense of it as he stared at her face through his mask.

All this time, she was alive.

She summoned as much effort as she could to find her voice, as brittle as it may be. “Who are you?”

He wanted to reach up and touch her cheek but he knew he wouldn’t be able to feel her physically. Instead, his eyes skimmed her neck, her lips, and up to her hair and the way it was perfectly slicked back in that signature bun of hers. And finally he looked deeply into her big brown eyes.

Vader released that slow mechanical breath. “You’re in me. . .and I’m in you.”

*How can I say this without breaking?
How can I say this without taking over?
How can I put it down into words
When it’s almost too much for my soul alone?*

*I loved and I loved and I lost you
I loved and I loved and I lost you*

*I loved and I loved and I lost you
And it hurts like hell*

8. Percussion Gun

AN:

Mercenary29: So happy to see you back! I'll do my best to update as often as possible
xoxo

Guest:... :D

Searth05: Thank you for your review! That's true Vader is full of hate at this time and his dreams are violent. And I agree, poor Leia! :(Don't worry though, Padme hasn't forgiven him, they haven't really met yet. But they do now in this chapter :D

Percussion Gun

*It's been a while
So I'll just beg, borrow and steal all your time
We'll call it dignified
Well now it all seems to be cut and dry
So I know which way to run
You're tired, my love
I feel the same*

Padme couldn't quite digest the news. After hearing the haunting voice echo the sentiments her husband once uttered — *you're in me and I'm in you* — she realized exactly who the man behind the mask was. And she couldn't handle it.

Her heart began to ache. She could feel a violent pain shooting out of her chest. She began to feel dizzy like her legs couldn't hold her up any longer.

Suddenly she collapsed, caught by Vader before her body fell to the floor.

Her children ran out, worrying for their mother's safety after a dreadful silence followed the gunshots she fired moments before.

Vader placed a fainted Padme on the couch — still trying to wrap his head around how she could be alive.

"Mum!" Leia screamed at the top of her lungs as her and Luke ran out into the living room. A perplexed Vader turned to face them.

His eyes locked with Leia's, realizing the terrible truth — the girl Obi-Wan was protecting was Padme's kid.

He could sense her fear. She was traumatized by the sight of the man who had captured her. Vader then glanced at Luke and he could sense the same familiar feelings. These were Padme's children.

No — *his* children.

"She's. . .not dead." He assured — although it hardly sounded comforting.

For a moment, Vader was frozen in his spot, trying to process all the information at once. The twins were also frozen in fear as they stared at their unconscious mother. Eventually, Vader made a judgment call, and began to pick Padme up, and take her aboard his ship.

"Let her go!" Luke cried, running after him, tugging at Vader's cape to stop him before he got onto the ship. Vader turned back to the twins once Padme was inside the ship.

"Get on the ship." Vader drawled.

After a moment's hesitation, Luke obliged.

"Luke!" Leia grabbed his arm before he could take his first step, refusing to let him go.

"I'm not leaving mum!" He yelled, retracting his hand from Leia's grasp, shoving her off him.

She quivered, watching her brother enter the ship willingly. Vader then turned to face her. That same frightful mask was back in her eyeline, reminding her of the torture she endured at his hands.

Vader gestured for her to follow Luke.

"No!" She snapped.

"Get on the ship." Vader's tone sounded more impatient this time. He reached out to grab her but a resistant Leia scurried backwards.

"You can't do this." She spat, shaking as Vader walked towards her. "Obi-Wan'll be back!"

Vader took a deep breath, releasing his frustration. He then picked up the screaming child and carried her to the ship.

"You." Vader's mechanical hiss bounced off the walls of a small hall inside the inquisitors' headquarters.

An anxious Taul glanced up at the dark Lord, furtively — almost afraid to look right into his red lenses.

"My Lord." He acknowledged with an awkward bow.

"I remember you." Vader paused. "Useless at combat. . .although you had potential — as a brothel watchdog."

Taul didn't know whether Vader sounded amused or utterly derisive.

"Come with me to Mustafar." Vader decided. "I've got a job for you."

A disoriented Padme woke up on a mattress on the floor beside her children in a small unit with no furniture other than a wonky wooden table.

Her eyes scanned her children who were terrified, cold and confused.

“Are you okay?!” She searched each of them urgently, making sure they weren’t hurt before pulling them in for a hug.

“He brought us here.” Luke told, hopelessly.

And Padme’s memory flashed back to Coruscant and the realization that her late husband was alive.

She worriedly looked around, trying to gauge what this place was — a dark room with no windows.

“I’m gonna get us out of here.” She nodded nervously. She then got up and approached the door.

“Open up!” She shouted, banging on the door relentlessly.

Her knocks were finally answered as the door creaked open.

“Hello, milady.”

Padme’s eyes skimmed over the imperial employee. “Let me out.” She warned

“I’m afraid I can’t do that. I’ve been instructed to guard you under the orders of Lord Vader.” Taul announced.

“Vader. . .” Padme repeated, sneeringly.

“Yes. He’s the Supreme Commander — who brought you here...”

Padme stood there, putting two and two together.

“I’m Taul,” The young man continued. “—and I’m available if you need anything. You simply press this button,” He pointed over to the controls on the wall beside the door. “And I’ll be alerted.”

“Aren’t you a little short to be named Taul?” Leia’s eyes squinted. Taul glanced at the little girl in quiet amusement.

“I want to speak with him.” Padme insisted. Her facial expression stressed her dourness

“I’m sorry. He’s not free at the moment. But he has requested your presence for dinner.”

“I wasn’t asking.” Padme said bluntly, folding her arms.

“Milady, a word of advice. . .if the Lord agrees to meet with you, you patiently wait for your window. Not many get that opportunity...”

Taul's eyes browsed the room, glancing at the children on the mattress — remembering his first encounter with the dark lord: the night his friend was murdered — before settling back on Padme. “Not many make it out alive.”

*Well take it from me
What else could you do?
Where do you get off?
And how can I get there too?*

*You'll never come back
I know which way to run
You're tired, my love
I feel the same*

Taul entered the unit hours later. Padme, Luke and Leia were still restlessly sitting on the wide mattress, twiddling their thumbs.

“Lord Vader is ready for you.” Taul proclaimed.

Padme gestured for her kids to stand up.

“—No.” Taul interjected. “Just you.”

Padme's eyes widened and daggers shot back at him.

“I'm not leaving my children.”

“I will watch them.”

And Padme scoffed at his response. “Over my dead body.”

“I can assure you, Miss, you have nothing to worry about. I'm good with kids — I have a little sister.”

Padme's bottom lip stiffened, unable to accept Taul's offer.

Taul leaned in, keeping his voice low. “If you want to plead your case for your freedom, I suggest you go.”

Padme was handcuffed by guards and led to another room, a larger room with a long dining table, set up for two with only one plate serving food — hers — and sitting at the head of it was Darth Vader.

“Let go of her.” Vader spoke calmly as the guards forced her to sit on a dining chair. Padme shoved them off with a twitch of her shoulder, as they unlocked her handcuffs.

Vader stared intently at a despondent and defiant Padme. She looked as beautiful as he remembered — just sad.

After taking a deep breath, Padme turned to look at him in the metal suit.

She couldn't look for long. It was a devastating sight to try and piece the puzzle together. She knew of the fire that she believed killed her husband but she had no idea of the extent of his injuries now that he survived.

Her eyes were now downcast, tormented by the picture that was painted in her head.

"What happened to you?" Her voice was a brittle whisper.

"Obi-Wan didn't tell you?" He asked with a sneer.

Padme remained silent, sensing his burgeoning disdain for Obi-Wan.

She looked around the room. The walls were black. Everything about the room felt dark and evil.

"So he's the reason you did all this," She shook her head, disappointed "—caused all this destruction and terror..."

Her eyes finally returned to him. "Is this the future you had in mind?"

She heard a tense inhale come from Vader.

"I'm sensing a little resentment, Padme." He said tightly.

She scoffed. "A little?"

Now leaning forward in her chair, "I thought you were dead. Then you show up at my door and kidnap me and my children?"

"*Your* children?" Vader cut in, surprising Padme.

Suddenly she felt sick to her stomach, sucking in a small, nervous breath.

"Don't do that." She quietly and cautiously warned.

"Do what?" It was now his turn to lean in.

And she failed to swallow down her anger. Her voice hoarse with emotion. "Don't think for one second that you should have any say in their lives."

"You and those children are mine." Vader calmly growled, jaw clenched under the mask. His temper sparked.

Aghast, Padme snapped at him. "You have no right—"

"—No you have no right." He glared. Breathless with anger, he stood up. The sounds of clinking cutlery ensued as he knocked the table.

His rage flowing through him like the lava surrounding his castle. "Allowing Obi-Wan to watch over *my* kids. The lack of respect you show me—"

"respect?" She scolded. "You want to talk about respect? You *left* me."

"You left first." He breathed out.

“No.” She concluded, standing up. “You abandoned us. . .for *this*.” She gestured to his surroundings. The cold, intimidating walls exemplifying the man he became.

“You chose *you*, remember?” She folded her arms, refusing to shed a tear. “Your power, your Empire. And I hope you’re happy with that. Because now that’s all you’ve got.”

Staring him down, she was adamant about holding her ground, hiding her fear as she stood before this *stranger*.

Vader smoldered with resentment for her words. He ushered in the guards. “Take her away!”

*Well everyone's saying rise and shine
It might not be true and that's just fine
'Cause I know which way to run
You're tired, my love
I feel the same*

*Now even rats will jump this ship
Oh just give me some piece of mind
'Cause I...*

White Rabbits — Percussion Gun

9. Welcome Home

Welcome Home

*Walking out of time
Looking for a better place
Something's on my mind
Always in my head space*

*But I know someday I'll make it out of here
Even if it takes all night or a hundred years
Need a place to hide, but I can't find one near
Wanna feel alive, outside I can't fight my fear*

“What happened?” Luke asked as Padme was returned to the unit.

“Are we getting out?” Leia added. Padme could barely look at the two pairs of bright eyes peering up at her.

“Not exactly.” Padme let out an exasperated sigh, feeling foolish that she let her emotions get to her instead of just bargaining for their freedom.

“But we will. I promise.” She assured after seeing the disappointment on their faces, joining them on the mattress.

Just then Taul knocked on the door and let himself in. Guards followed him in, carrying plates of food and packages.

“What is all this?” Padme jumped up, observing what they laid out on the wooden table.

“Food. Water. Clothes.” Taul pointed at each item.

“Clothes?” She cocked an eyebrow.

“Yes. We were sent to your apartment to pick up some stuff for you to, you know, make this place feel like home.”

“You went to my apartment?” She seethed.

The guards all left, closing the door behind them.

“I’m just doing my job, milady.”

Padme scoffed. “Tell me something, Taul. . .how do you sleep at night? Are you proud to work for a fascist regime? Do they pay you well . . .to sneak into people’s homes — to rob them of their basic rights?”

Taul clicked his tongue and snickered to himself. “Yeah that’s what the system needs. . .another privileged senator pretending things were all fine and dandy before the Empire came along. You know what my life looked like while you believed we were living in a utopian society? My father died thirteen years ago during the Clone War when I was 15. We were left with nothing. I dropped out of school, went to work to take care of my sick mother and little sister. Where was the republic then? You see, my planet wasn’t even on your radar. The truth is democracy died long before the Empire rose.”

“...How old’s your sister?” Padme asked

“17.”

“Do you think that she’s protected. . .now that you work here?” She probed.

Taul remained silent.

“You see,” She shook her head. ‘I know we failed you. We failed everyone. But you were lied to.’ She paused. “...One day, when you for whatever reason can no longer adhere to their rules, you too will be their prisoner. And you’ll realize that giving up your freedom in exchange for security. . .isn’t really safe at all.”

“Lord Vader.” Palpatine’s scratchy voice came across the holo-projector.

“Master.” Vader greeted, kneeling down.

“Senator Amidala is alive.” Palpatine’s words were laced with venom. “And you brought her here?”

“I will section off an area in my fortress to keep an eye on her.”

“What about the offspring of Anakin Skywalker?”

“I will keep them here too.”

Palpatine remained quiet for a moment, deep in thought.

“You must train the boy. Teach him to use the dark side of the force.”

“Senator Amidala won’t approve.” Vader considered.

Palpatine’s eyes were glowing with malevolence. “If she is to stand in our way then she too is an enemy of the Empire.”

“Welcome home.” Taul brought Padme and the children into the newly built apartment designed for the three of them.

Both Luke and Leia looked around with thinly veiled despondency. Padme could barely hear Taul giving them the tour of the kitchen and the two bedrooms. All she could think about was how were they ever going to get out.

"You can enjoy the terrace," Taul proposed. "Although it's not much of a 5 star view. . unless you like lava covered mountains." He chuckled but one look at their desolate faces had him clearing his throat.

"Read the room, Taul." He mumbled to himself before circling around.

"And this door right here," Taul began again, pointing to his left. "—leads to Lord Vader's chamber... I suggest you avoid entering that hall without permission."

Padme glanced around before her eyes rested back on her children.

"It's okay." She assured them, understanding the turmoil they were experiencing. "I will figure something out."

She didn't know how much more she could take. Vader was hitting them with one surprise after another. She did her best to hide her own fear — the fear that they were truly stuck and no one, not even Obi-Wan, could save them.

*Isn't it lovely, all alone?
Heart made of glass, my mind of stone
Tear me to pieces, skin to bone
Hello, welcome home*

"We're never getting out of here!" Luke yelled, plopping himself on the couch.

"Don't say that." Padme pleaded softly, sitting beside him.

"...He wants Obi-Wan." Leia finally spoke.

And Padme's eyes shifted, unable to share the real reason they were here.

"Vader's. . .he's the man who questioned me. He wanted to get to him." Leia's voice was low, undercut with a melancholic heaviness. "He — he hurt me."

Padme's eyes glowered at the news. She was livid.

"What did he do?!"

Vader arrived to the apartment with Taul. He felt better about them being so close to him — the same man who created the most isolating castle to be left completely alone. The apartment would certainly be more comfortable than the little room they were forced into, and he did prioritize their comfort, having his staff fetch their belongings, clothes, toys, anything they found lying around that they thought would be useful.

"There you are." Padme got up from the couch to greet him, planting a kiss on his now maskless face. The familiar sweet taste of her succulent lips came rushing back to him, as did the way she used to greet him at the door whenever he came home. Her fingers ran through his golden hair strands like they used to, and his arms wrapped around her waist. The twins

then ran up to him, one now on either side of him, giddy at the sight of him coming home — the same way he used to run to his mother whenever she got home safely.

“There you are!” Padme scowled — snapping Vader out of his weird day dream.

She raced over to him, glaring up at him — rage pulsing through her veins.

“Don’t you ever lay a hand on my children again!” She threatened.

Vader’s eyes darted from Padme to Leia, perusing the little girl’s facial expression, remembering their first encounter. No one could read his. Was there remorse under the mask? Ambivalence? Or did he simply feel indifferent to their pain?

“Fine.” Vader’s gruff reply sickened her even more.

“Now let us go home!” She ordered.

“This. . . is your home now.” He rasped.

And Padme felt her fury stir within her, her heartbeat pounding like a symphony of drums.

“You can’t keep us here!” She shrieked as she raised her hand and slapped his chest.

Screaming at him, shoving him, anything to end this nightmare.

For a moment there was no reaction. Vader let her release her frustrations and took a few punches — until he didn’t.

“That’s enough.” He warned. His voice vibrating a quiet roughness.

A frantic Padme aimed for him for once more. This time, he grabbed her wrist before she could reach him. She tried to whack him with the other but he grabbed that arm too.

She tried to wriggle out of his grasp, her body twisted in sinuous motions to escape but failed. She then attempted to attack again, trying to shove him once more — even using her legs to kick him off. Her children screaming at him to let her go.

Eventually the flicker of irritation he felt was overtaken by his anger quickening his blood — unable to tamp down his rage that was now boiling over.

He pushed her back, unknowingly tapping into the force. The strenuous push hit her hard and she fell back — almost hitting the wall until Vader used the force to stop her from smashing into it.

She fell to the floor and, after glancing at her with a heavy exhale, he walked out. Luke and Leia ran to their mother’s side.

And a hand reached out to pull her up.

She peered up at Taul, and accepted his help.

“Can I ask you a question?” Taul asked in a curious tenor, once the kids were out of earshot, as he brought her a glass of water. “—a personal question.”

Padme nodded as she rested her back on the couch. She didn't feel like herself anymore. She used to be good at keeping it together — controlling her emotions. Here she was a wreck.

“...What do you mean to him?”

Padme swallowed a gulp. “Why do you ask?”

“I've been here a long time.” Taul shrugged.

“So?” Her voice a small, croaky sound.

“It doesn't make sense... I've never seen him show mercy to anyone.”

“This is mercy?” She commented with a sarcastic scoff.

“Let's put it this way.” He chuckled lightly, almost as amused as he was surprised. “If anyone else did what you just did. . .they would've been dead by now.”

*Thought I found a way
Thought I found a way out
But you never go away
So I guess I gotta stay now*

Oh I hope someday I'll make it out of here

Billie Eilish — Lovely

10. Where Does The Good Go?

Where Does The Good Go?

*Where do you go with your broken heart in tow?
What do you do with the left over you?
And how do you know when to let go?
Where does the good go, where does the good go?*

“Got you the groceries you asked for.” Taul entered the apartment, passing over the bag.

“Thanks.” Padme said warmly, adding: “For yesterday.”

Taul shot her a nod in acknowledgment.

“...You okay?” He eventually asked.

“I’ve,” She sighed, “—been better... Trying to be strong for them.” Her eyes searched the terrace, where Luke and Leia tossed a small ball to each other.

“Yeah.” Taul offered a polite smile. “...You know, if I could let you guys go, I would. Hell, I’d probably get out too.”

Padme smiled back at him softly. Her gentle eyes keeping the faith. “Who knows, maybe there’s hope for all of us. Maybe we’ll get out soon and. . .build a better future — for people like your little sister.”

Taul’s cheeks lifted as a fond look smeared across his face. His hand raised slightly in a salute before he headed off.

Vader stepped out onto the terrace from his throne room, watching the twins playing — seemingly making the best of a bad situation. It seemed having their own belongings helped.

It was all going well until they spotted him. Startled by his presence, fear washed over them. Leia, wide-eyed and mouth agape, quickly got up to distance herself as he strutted over to them.

“Leave us alone!” Luke’s lips stretched tensely.

Vader could feel that they were tormented by terror. With every step he took, he could sense them suppressing a shiver. It felt like an icy dagger to the heart. Everyone greeted him this way now. Every pair of eyes that landed on him looked at him in a raw panic — it does a lot to your mental state. It gets harder and harder to see yourself any other way. They see you as a monster; therefore, you become the monster.

But seeing his own children make a desperate attempt to flee at the mere sight of him was quite the wakeup call. Did he deserve it? *Probably* — he thought to himself, cushioning the blow. But the pain hammered on his heart nonetheless.

“I won’t touch you.” Vader kept his voice low as his eyes held Leia’s. “I won’t hurt you again.”

Leia stood behind her brother, holding onto his arms. Neither wanting to be near him.

Luke then glanced at his ball that remained by the railing and then at the door of their apartment, wanting to grab his stuff and go inside without passing Vader.

Luke then subtly used the force to grab his ball, catching Vader’s attention.

Vader perked up, his eyes squinting.

“Obi-Wan’s been teaching you the ways of the force.” He realized.

But Luke and Leia both remained silent.

“Here.” He said abruptly, throwing Luke his lightsaber. He caught it.

“Ignite it.” Vader directed.

Luke glanced at his sister and then back on the lightsaber, and did as he was told.

The red light made Leia jump back as Luke twirled the laser sword around.

Vader then force-snatched the ball out of his hand and made it hover in the air.

“Keep it up.” He instructed.

And Luke did his best to use the lightsaber to guide the ball.

“Good.” His voice a gruff drawl. “Now do it with your eyes closed.”

Luke proceeded to close his eyes, taking in Vader’s words as he instructed him.

“Am I doing it?” Luke asked.

“Yes.” Leia replied quietly. Her skeptical eyes not trusting Vader one bit.

“Well done.” Vader praised.

Luke’s eyes fluttered open and he couldn’t hide the corners of his mouth turning into a grin, as he faced his sister, feeling content with himself.

Vader then turned to Leia, gesturing for Luke to let her have a go.

Leia’s scorching eyes glared at him.

“You don’t want to?” Vader asked

“No.” She said sternly.

“Just try it.” Luke encouraged.

Reluctant to do so, Leia ended up taking the lightsaber from him in a huff.

“Stay with me.” She whispered to her brother. And he nodded.

Hesitant at first, she gradually raised the weapon, and her eyes fell closed.

Unable to feel the ball leaving the ground, she was about to give up.

“Focus.” Vader ordered. “Use your feelings.”

Leia couldn’t sense the ball, having had no training from Obi-Wan, but eventually got it an inch off the ground.

“You’re getting there!” Luke cheered but she couldn’t channel her feelings into it.

“This is ridiculous.” She snapped, opening her eyes — too uncomfortable with the situation to take it seriously. She then threw the lightsaber and it only narrowly missed Vader’s head.

Vader grabbed the lightsaber in time and attached it back to his belt, as he studied her.

Both twins peeked up in shock, afraid of his response.

“You’ve got good aim.” He nodded. “Wait here.”

And Vader left, leaving them both confused and on edge.

Vader returned with a blaster. Both kids scurried back, their bodies growing cold with dread, as he made his way towards them.

“Take this.” He handed the gun over.

Doe-eyed and legs wobbly, Leia’s heart lurched. However, she received the gun — thinking it was better in her hands than his.

“Shoot that window.” Vader suggested, pointing up.

“What?” Luke gasped, raising his hands up in protest. “It’s a gun!”

“It’s a weapon. . .no different from this one.” Vader patted the lightsaber on his belt.

“She’s ten years old.” Luke stressed

“So?” Vader finished, daringly.

“What if I shoot you?” Leia snidely remarked.

And for the first time Vader chuckled. “I trust you.”

The gun went off, and the shot was heard through the apartment. Padme got up like a bolt of lightning, fearfully rushing out onto the terrace.

She was met with the three faces staring back at her — Vader, Luke and Leia — the latter aiming a gun up high.

Aghast, Padme charged over to them.

“What the hell are you doing?!” She roared, taking the gun out of Leia’s hand and throwing it at Vader’s chest. She grabbed both her children’s hands and dragged them inside.

“Padme—” Vader began, following them, but she shut the door in his face.

*Look me in the eye and tell me you don't find me attractive
Look me in the heart and tell me you won't go
Look me in the eye and promise no love is like our love
Look me in the heart and unbreak broken*

It won't happen

After lecturing her children for getting involved in such a dangerous activity, and for taking any advice from Vader, she then stepped outside, closing the door behind her so the kids wouldn’t hear anything.

She stormed over to Vader, who was waiting patiently.

“Have you lost your mind?!” She shouted “Handing a gun over to a ten year old?”

“She had good aim.” Vader shrugged.

“I warned you. Stay away from them.” She said sharply before turning on her heel.

“...I want to know them.” Vader breathed out.

Padme turned back around, her eyes glaring back at him.

“You had that chance when they were born.” She hissed. About to turn away, she was stopped only by his seething tone.

“You can’t keep them from me.” There was a sharpness in his voice. His words were a quiet threat.

Padme, refusing to dignify him with a response, headed back inside with a stiff gait.

After putting her kids to bed, and taking a hot shower, Padme dried herself off with a towel.

She then rummaged through the bags she never bothered to unpack, in hopes that she would be out of here soon, looking for something to wear to bed.

Suddenly, the door opened and Vader and Taul entered.

Surprised was too tame a word to describe the look on their faces. Jaws dropped, Taul’s eyebrows raised, while Vader’s lowered.

Scanning her body from her head to her toes — the familiarity and beauty of her silky smooth skin returned to Vader in an instant — reminding him of how deprived he was of warmth, lustful whims and sensual intensities.

Admiring her svelte shoulders connected by the neatness of her neck, he was immediately distracted by her supple breasts that would soften even the roughest hands. His gaze dwelled on her nipples, for a moment, he could remember how they taste. His eyes paid homage to the curve of her hips and her shapely thighs — the texture vivid in his mind. He could feel her lingering on his fingertips, bringing him back to the days of possessing her body like muscle memory. His stare lost in her roseate vulva, in the way her body oozes elegance. It pierced through him, nourished him, and shook him. Reminding him of all the intricacies, ecstasies and perversities of their marriage, channeling all the emotions that altered his temperament — lust, longing, violent irrationality, jealousy.

Tormented by the dream she represented, his capricious eyes now glowering at Taul — realizing the young man had witnessed it all — the intimacy of his wife and mysteries of her sexuality that should be reserved for him. A manic moment overcame him, growing dangerously possessive.

Using the force, Vader slung the towel she previously used, that was draped over the couch, onto her. She quickly wrapped it around her bare body.

Not even a second later, his hand slightly raised, and with a jerk of two fingers, Vader snapped Taul's neck.

Shaken to her core, Padme's breath escaped her mouth like a fog as she watched Taul's body drop to the floor. Her heart sank, her stomach twisted, her muscles constricted as she stared in terror at the lifeless body of the man who became her friend. Feeling sick, her hands flew to her painful chest, as her exhalations got caught in her throat, unable to comprehend what she just saw.

Her eyes finally set on Vader, shooting him a look of sheer disgust.

His demeanor exuding a hint of shame mixed with vindictiveness, he walked away.

Padme couldn't believe how detached he had become, like people meant nothing to him. She ran to Taul, apologizing hectically, feeling like she failed him, as tears streamed down her cheeks. And two guards came to scoop him up — like the act of removing a dead body was part and parcel of their lives.

*It's love that leaves and breaks the seal
Of always thinking you would be
Real happy and healthy, strong and calm
Where does the good go?
Where does the good go?*

Tegan and Sara — Where Does The Good Go?

11. Burned Bridges

AN:

Mercenary: Thank you! You know I knew it was gonna go this way but I got more attached to Taul than I thought while writing so I didn't wanna kill him off in the end :(But... it's my tribute to the movie Dangerous Minds I guess. He "died because he didn't knock." :D

Burned Bridges

*This is how the story went
I met someone by accident
Who blew me away, blew me away
And It was in the darkest of my days
When you took my sorrow and you took my pain
And buried them away, buried them away*

Padme lied awake in bed in the middle of the night. She couldn't get the sight of Taul's lifeless body out of her head.

She hated the bed she lied on, she just wanted to be back home in her own. She hated everything about this place. The walls made her feel so confined. The room was stuffy. Most of all, she hated seeing the soulless man Anakin had become — if she could even call him Anakin anymore. He was all Vader. She didn't think there was any of Anakin in there.

Some would say she loved him too much without rhyme or reason so she wondered if this pain was her punishment. But a woman in love with a man sees all his greatness — sometimes, only his greatness. And she wouldn't apologize for that — for if she didn't allow herself to fall madly in love, she would have gone mad in the absence of it. She'd rather be lost in something than lost without it. And one look at Luke and Leia proved that even in the worst of times, you can find the most precious gifts.

But Anakin, or Vader she should say, seems to have lost his mind. And she's lost hers too. But it was so much better when they lost them together.

Padme ran up to Anakin after his typical reckless behaviour got him his arm cut off by Count Dooku. Her heart almost stopped when she saw the state of him. She didn't care that Obi-Wan and Yoda were in their field of vision. All she could think about was that she almost lost him today.

“Why did you do that?! Why didn’t you listen to Obi-Wan?” She whined anxiously. Her pleading eyes now staring into his after inspecting his arm.

Anakin rested his forehead on hers once he felt her arms wrap around his neck, her soothing fingers stroking his hair behind his ears. It felt safe and comfortable to be able to lean on her, she numbed the pain. Trying to distract himself from the pain, the touch of her hand and the scent of her perfume helped him breathe steadily.

“Does it hurt?” She finally asked

“Not at all.” He replied with a sarcastic smile.

She shook her head hopelessly, full of worry, wishing he wouldn’t put himself in risky situations but knowing that he’d do it anyway.

She shrugged. “I don’t know what to tell you.”

After a deliberate pause, he smirked teasingly. “You could. . .try telling me you love me again.”

And just as he expected, it riled her up. She pulled away, her instinct was to hide her vulnerability. “I thought we were about to die!” She said with exaggerated insistence. “And with the way you’re going, you won’t be around for much longer.”

“Padme.” He called, soothingly. The sound of her name leaving his lips made her heart flutter. His left hand reached out to rest on the small of her back, pulling her back in... One touch, and she came back.

“What?” She muttered, almost in a sulk — refusing to look him in the eye.

“Padme.” He drawled once more, and this time his eyes held hers. She couldn’t look away with how fervidly he gazed at her.

Drowning in her beauty. Knowing that one look into those big brown enchanting eyes would have him do anything for her — driving him mad for her, he felt like he had dreamed her up. She had everything he wanted and everything he lost. There was a purity to her made obvious by the way she saw the world. She focused on what she wanted the world to be, regardless of what it was, and those ideals carried through her work. She was the quintessential nurturer, like a mother — you felt her warmth the minute you were in her presence.

“Marry me.” He said finally. His voice quiet and firm.

“You’re crazy!” She cried. She was equally as shocked as she was amused, doing her best to conceal a giddy smile.

As much as she tried to brush off his words, she couldn’t deny that there was a powerful current between them. They may seem like polar opposites but they had one thing in common: a dream. They dreamed of the same madness, the same pleasures. They shared a desire to feel pure happiness, to embrace the kind of intimacy that could only come from a lover.

Anakin softly chuckled at her as she turned away from him, knowing he made her blush. But his smile soon faded. He now had that look in his eye — a reckless, daring, determined impulse that you knew no one could talk him out of.

“Marry me anyway.” The words rolled off his tongue like he was simply asking for her to join him on a spontaneous stroll in the park.

But the warmth of his voice in her ear made everything seem possible.

And everything was possible, even the worst things. Padme still couldn't believe it as she tried to reconcile who Anakin was and who Anakin is now. Perhaps it was a natural progression — it's not like he didn't have all the dangers (his sudden caprices, his arrogance, his temper) of his dark side back then too — but they were balanced out by his light side — his thoughtfulness, his gentleness and his generosity.

But all the fear and anger he held onto, that was triggered by his dark side, eventually took over the light — the hope, confidence and the calmness — within him. And somehow their dream turned into the galaxy's worst nightmare.

*I can't stand the state that I'm in
Sometimes it feels like the walls closing in*

*Try and burn my troubles away
Drown my sorrow the same way
It seems no matter how hard I try
It feels like there's something just missing inside*

Vader stepped out onto the terrace, watching Leia sitting there, reading one of her books. He saw so much of Padme in her, except when she smiled, then he saw his old face. It was days like these where it wasn't so easy to keep old feelings suppressed in a tight bud — some feelings were patiently waiting to blossom.

From the corner of her eye, Leia spotted the dark towering figure. She didn't bother to look up at him.

“Go away.” She kept her voice firm and her eyes on her book. But Vader wouldn't budge.

“You think one training session has changed anything?” She added. “I don't forgive you. . you never even apologized.”

“I'm sorry.” He uttered bluntly.

Leia shook her head. “You forget that I was there. I remember how you tried to kill Obi-Wan.”

“No.” Vader stopped her, joining her to sit on the other patio chair beside her. “You don't have to worry about that.”

“What, you don't wanna kill him?” Leia asked, doubtful.

“No, I do.” Vader exhaled deeply, embracing a moment of honesty. “But I won't. We need each other... He needs me alive to absolve him of his guilt. And I need to hate him. It fuels

me, and I'd probably get too much pleasure out of beating him once and for all..." He paused, taking a good look at his daughter. "Guess I'm not ready to say goodbye."

Suddenly, Padme slid the terrace door open, forcing them both out of their thoughts.

Standing there in a deep blue, embroidered maxi dress with long flowy sleeves, Vader looked her up and down, taking a moment to appreciate her breathtaking beauty. She didn't look a day older with the top half of her hair loosely braided up, leaving two face-framing tendrils, as the bottom half of her hair toppled down her shoulders like silky chestnut coils.

*I wish I could lay down beside you when the day is done
And wake up to your face against the morning sun
But like everything I've ever known, you'll disappear one day
So I'll spend my whole life hiding my heart away*

Padme folded her arms, and Vader was aware of her scrutiny.

"Leia, get inside." She ordered sternly.

Leia glanced up at Vader, like she was analyzing him and the words he said earlier. If she didn't know any better, she'd guess that he missed Obi-Wan.

"Now!" Padme's voice raised. And Leia dragged her feet over.

Once Leia was inside. Vader's eyes met Padme's, whose were looking daggers at him.

"I know what you're doing." She warned once Leia was out of earshot.

"Talking?" He said smugly.

Padme released an irritated sigh and proceeded to close the door behind her.

"Just can't let it go can you?" She began walking towards him. "You still have this need to control everything."

"Well, if that's the case," He gazed down at her, "I'm not doing a very good job with you."

"This is funny to you?" She scowled. "For the last time, stay away from them!"

Vader puffed his chest. "For the last time. . .no."

"You don't care about them!" She insisted, getting frustrated.

"That's not true." He drawled.

"If it wasn't, we wouldn't be here!" She snapped, taking a moment to let out an agitated breath, trying to keep her voice low so the kids wouldn't hear. "What you did to Taul..." Her forehead crinkled — she still couldn't stomach the sight of it, even in her memory. "—you have no respect for anybody!"

Her eyes fell to the floor. "Not even me."

She started to grow annoyed with herself. Why did she bother? What answer was she hoping for? It seemed as though she was desperate for a miracle — like somehow Anakin would emerge from some hole he was buried in, and take it all back, say everything she wanted to hear. He would bring back exaltations and fantasies.

“Why’d you do it?” She finally asked, knowing that it didn’t matter how often she clung onto logic, desires of the heart were always going to get in her way. She was going to probe and push, hoping he would snap out of it, and show her just a hint of the old him. Maybe he would realize how heartless he had become. Maybe he would wake up and decide to leave the darkness. Or maybe the logical part of her brain should just get her to shut up and walk away, leave him alone to lie in the bed he made.

“Because he was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, or. . .because you think you own me.” Her voice was harsh, and he could sense her disdain for him.

But the more bothered she got, the less he did. He knew better than anyone, the angrier she was with him, the more hateful her words, it all just meant she wasn’t over it.

He leaned in, knowing she couldn’t see the smirk on his face. His whispers came out in a deep synthetic voice. “In the heat of passion, you would’ve begged me to say that.”

His words sent a shiver down her spine, throwing her off balance.

But she quickly snapped out of the haze he swept over her.

In an attempt to hide her flushed cheeks, she screeched out. “Oh you are just disgusting — y-you’re horrible!”

She stormed off, and he knew he had riled her up.

Once she shut the door behind her, though, he stopped smiling. It was getting harder to keep up with the incessant lies he told himself about how Anakin was gone, and how he didn’t hate himself for everything he has become and everything he destroyed.

He looked up at the sky. It was getting dark, and the only light left came from the apartment Padme and the children were in — the part of the window Padme hadn’t covered with the curtain. Perhaps, there were some cracks in the dark after all, some cracks to let the light in.

*How many rules can I break?
How many lies can I make?
How many roads must I turn
To find me a place where the bridge hasn’t burned?*

The next couple of days, Vader kept his distance, but watched them whenever they were on the terrace from his throne room. He waited until Padme was indoors to get the chance to talk to them — he didn’t need Padme yelling at him.

He stepped out once he saw Luke by himself, working on his use of the force. He reminded him of himself, as Luke managed to keep a pear in the air without touching it.

“How long has Obi-Wan been training you?” Vader asked, now standing behind him, making Luke jump up — almost losing his control of the pear.

“Not long.” He replied, now taking a bite of it.

“Do you enjoy it?” Vader made his way in front of him.

Luke didn’t look up, just gave off a casual shrug. “Yeah. It makes me feel like I share something with my dad.”

Vader exhaled slowly. “Your dad.”

“Yeah.” Luke lifted the pear in the air once more with the force. “He died before I was born. Didn’t make it ’til the end of the Clone War. . .but they say he died a hero.”

“He was quite the Jedi.” Vader acknowledged, and Luke could tell it wasn’t another question.

Luke then observed him. “You knew him?”

“No.” Vader paused. And Luke turned to face the view outside.

Vader, now looking at his son, felt a sudden familiarity. All this time he hadn’t felt it yet. He knew what Padme and the kids meant to Anakin but he couldn’t emotionally connect to them. He wanted to soulfully feel it. And now, he felt a slight connection. A connection he hadn’t felt since he believed Padme had died. A connection that was severed so abruptly, he had forgotten what it felt like once he burned all his bridges. But in this moment there was a hint of it. Deep, deep down, he wondered if he’d ever be able to fully feel it again... Then he would no longer have to live with the one fear he never wanted to come true — his fear of abandonment.

“...I am him.” He murmured eventually.

Luke’s wide eyes slowly and hesitantly faced him.

“What?” His voice was barely audible.

“I am your father.”

Oh, Lord, what can I say?

*I’m so sad since you went away
Time, time, ticking on me
Alone is the last place I wanted to be*

Brandi Carlile (Mashup) — What Can I Say / Hiding My Heart Away

12. Saving For A Rainy Day

AN: Happy Holidays! Xo

Mercenary: Yep, haha! She flips!

Travis Brown: Haha! Here you go!

Saving For a Rainy Day

*We'd be so less fragile if we're made from metal
And our hearts from iron and our minds from steel
If we built an armor for our tender bodies
Could we love each other? Would we strive to feel?*

*And you want three wishes
One to fly the heavens; one to swim like fishes
And then one you're saving for a rainy day
If your lover ever takes her love away*

Luke raced through the house, now standing before his mother and sister, who were resting their legs up comfortably on the couch.

Padme and Leia were both taken aback by his out-of-breath manner.

"Is it true?" He demanded, not blinking.

"What? What's wrong?" Padme sat forward, observing him vigilantly.

Luke's unsteady and rapid inhalations made him enunciate his words. "Is Vader our real father?"

"No!" Leia burst out laughing. 'That's impossible. He's messing with you! Mum, tell him.' Her hand flailed about to dismiss the news. But she grew quiet, noticing her mother's glaring silence. "Mum?"

Padme's pale face was all they were met with. Her body paralyzed — unable to fight off a rising panic.

"Tell him!" Leia urged, nervously, as her fear spiked.

"He told you..." Breathless whispers was all a contemplative Padme could muster — pretty much talking to herself.

“So it’s true.” Luke’s jaw tightened as he pursed his lips.

“What? No.” Leia gasped, sitting upright — her eyes anxiously going back and forth from her brother to her mother. “No!” She persisted, trembling inside.

Padme’s heart leaped into her throat. Her glistening eyes on the verge of tears as she watched their hearts break.

“I didn’t want you to find out like this.” She lowered her head. She didn’t know what to say, she was still in shock.

Luke shook his head and stormed off.

“Luke!” Padme pleaded. And Leia got up to join him, pushing past her.

“Leia!” She urged, now getting up to follow them.

Leia turbulently turned back around upon hearing her mother’s footsteps. “No!” Leia yelled out an indignant cry, causing Padme’s movements to come to a halt. “Vader? Really? Vader is our father?!”

Before Padme could gather a clear explanation, Leia headed into the bedroom she shared with her brother, closing the door behind her with a hysterical strike.

Padme stood there, trying to give them some space to process it — trying to give *herself* a moment to figure out what she was going to tell them.

The kids had remained in their bedroom for at least a couple of hours when Padme knocked on the door.

“Dinner’s ready.” She called but no one answered.

Feeling exasperated, she knocked again. This time more assertively. “Please come out so we can talk.”

“I have nothing to say to you!” Luke shouted from behind the door. Padme rubbed her brow as if to ward off a headache before her hand rested over her mouth. She began to walk back to the kitchen table. There was nothing more she could do right now.

Just then, she heard the door creak open.

“Leia!” She was perched on the edge of her seat as her daughter approached the dining table.

“Don’t flatter yourself, I’m just hungry.” Leia plopped herself down on the chair.

“Please let me explain—” Padme urged with gentle persistence.

“—you had plenty of chances to do that.” Leia groaned. “So much for getting better at communicating, eh?”

“You have no idea how hard it’s been.” Padme affectionately objected.

And a wave of frustration rushed over Leia. “Yes. We. Do!” She dropped her fork back on the table. “That’s all we heard from uncle Ben.”

She began to mimic his voice. “*Don’t bring up your father because it’s hard on your mother. Be patient, think of her feelings.*”

Leia scoffed. “We’ve been walking on eggshells around you.”

Padme’s eyes flew closed as she apologized with a heavy heart. “I am. . .so sorry. I know I didn’t handle it well but...” Her brooding eyes settled Leia who was eager to dismiss her excuses before she made them. Padme was overwhelmed with anxiety. “I made a mistake — people make mistakes!”

The sight of her dejected mother resulted in a more pensive Leia, stopping herself from arguing. She was good at being strong for others, even at times when she hadn’t let her own pain sink in. Her voice adopted a softer tone. “We gave you time. So just. . .give us time.”

Padme apprehensively bit her fingernail as she watched Leia eat.

Finally, Luke trudged out of the bedroom.

“Luke!” Padme called hastily — her pitch laced with sympathy and reflectiveness. She couldn’t quite read his inscrutable face but she hoped he was coming around.

Instead, he grabbed his plate, about to head back to his room.

“Come on,” She soothed, pleadingly. “Sit with us.”

His furious eyes caught hers for a second before turning on his heel.

Padme dropped her napkin on the table and got up, gravely. “You know what—”

“—the ball, Luke!” She blurted out.

“What?” He stopped in his tracks, peering back at her.

“The book Uncle Ben reads to you?” She spoke with burgeoning exasperation. “The one about letting go of your anger. . .that burns your relationships?” She folded her arms and eyed him sternly. “Let go of the ball, Luke.”

It was now Luke’s turn to shoot her that same grim stare that he inherited from her.

“You’re comparing you lying to me about who my father is to some dumb book?!” He barked.

He flounced out of the room, slamming his bedroom door shut behind him.

Padme fell back onto her chair, haphazardly, giving up.

“You should really read that book again, mum.” Leia’s narrowing eyes met her mother’s — a pinched expression on her face. “You’re holding on too tight. Let angry people cool off.”

“I just want you to hear my side.” She supplicated.

“It’s your turn to be patient.” Leia maintained, reiterating Obi-Wan’s words. “It’s your turn to understand.”

Padme nodded. "I will."

"And while you're at it. . . *pray* for peace." Leia' said sharply, struggling to hide her own resentment.

Padme couldn't sit here twiddling her thumbs. Seeing the pain on her son's face, seeing her daughter try to suppress her own emotions about a situation as dire as the return of the absent father, she couldn't believe Vader would drop this bomb on them.

She began to quiver with anger at the thought of it. He has stepped over the line one too many times, causing this family so much suffering.

"That's it!" She slammed the palm of her hand on the table and fiercely got up.

"Where are you going?" Leia studied her, watching her approach the door Taul warned them to steer clear of. "Don't go in there!"

But Padme defiantly pushed the button that opened up the pathway to Vader's chamber.

Padme came blazing through the hall and into Vader's chamber.

"How dare you?!" Her razor sharp glare settled on him just as one of the droids was about to disassemble his suit.

He held his hand up before the machines could touch his suit, preventing them from taking off his helmet. He glanced up at her. It was hard to concentrate with her luscious curls cascading down her shoulders, and knowing her elegant curves were under that green velvet dress — the image of her naked body replayed over and over in his head since he walked in on her changing that night.

However, her chiding tone helped him snap back into focus.

"How dare you tell him!" This wasn't a question, and he knew it. He could feel her deepest fears masquerading as anger. Her lip quivered, her eyes a fiery sting that typically would've had the old him wanting to console her, embrace her in his arms until she felt at ease. But he didn't have any empathy for her now.

"He deserves to know the truth." Vader spoke coolly, relaxed in his chair. "He was bound to find out sometime."

"You have turned that boy's world upside down!" A shrill cry came out of her. "And Leia. . . this is her worst nightmare!"

Even if he weren't wearing a mask, she wouldn't have been able to gauge his expression. There was nothing beneath it but a deadpan face. "Don't blame me for your mistakes."

"Excuse me?" She spat. Her shoulders rolling back.

"I'm not the one who lied to them." He sighed. It seemed he was being intentionally nonchalant, irritating her — ignoring the fact that her face was contorted with rage. "This one's on you, Padme. You should've told them the truth."

“Why you smug son of a—” She fumed and began attacking his machines, smacking the desk, slamming her fist on the buttons, pulling out wires.

He charged over to her in a flash, grabbing her hands off his technical equipment, holding her in place. She tried to resist his death grip on her wrists, that seized her to the point it hurt.

“Stop.” He growled calmly, cornering her to wall.

Her noisy constrained breaths were released after she finally stopped fighting back — accepting the defeat which, in turn, made him loosen his grip on her wrists.

Her hostile glare didn’t waver, though. Her nostrils flared as he met her steadfast stare. “As far as I’m concerned, their father died 10 years ago.”

Vader’s hardened eyes narrowed into slits behind the lenses. “Whatever gets you through the night.” An intense exhale left his mouth. “But they’re my kids. And you’re still my wife.”

“No.” She hissed, looking down at her arms, squeezing her wrists to help with the aches after he released them. “My husband would never be as cruel as you!” Her voice began to boom, as her eyes returned to his mask. Her heart raced as she willed herself to stop trembling.

“Fine. I’m cruel.” He grunted out, tensing his muscles. “But you’ve done stuff too.”

She scoffed derisively at his words, almost laughing at him, which only made him take a vengeful step closer to her. She now felt smothered, pressed up against the wall. His chest blocking her view and turning her breaths, that escaped her lips, into muffled sounds.

“Imagine tearing apart everything you know for someone. . .who brings Obi-Wan to kill you.” His jaw clenched, remembering the betrayal like it was yesterday. He had pictured it enough times in his nightmares.

“You’re with him.” Anakin raged at a teary-eyed Padme whose eyes were frantically darting from him to Obi-Wan. “You brought him here to kill me!”

“Believe what you want.” She huffed lazily. She didn’t care for his paranoid outbursts anymore, forcing her into submission.

“I killed for you.” He bellowed in a gruff voice. “I almost killed myself for you. I’m stuck in this suit because I wanted to save you!” He felt like a ticking time bomb. The flickering flame within him about to explode.

“Well, if I had known what you’d turn into. . .you should’ve let me die.” Her eyelids lowered — and a feeling of inertia took over.

“I love you!” Padme beseeched. Her imploring eyes were desperate to connect with him, to bring back the man she knew and loved.

Padme shook her head slightly as she let out a bitter sigh.

His hands clenched into fists at his sides, his eyes shooting lasers through his red lenses. He hated how her once warm brown eyes were now replaced by a vacant stare.

“I’d rather *die* than be your wife.” She snarled like she was disgusted.

“Liar!” Anakin roared, wanting to silence her, sick of every deceitful word that came out of her mouth.

And as her words left her lips, he felt himself going over the edge, shaking with untamed aggression. The way she said ‘wife’ made it sound like it was the most disgraceful term in the world.

Overcome with a surge of wild, violent fury, he no longer cared to contain the tightness he felt in his chest.

Suddenly, he grabbed her by the neck with his metal hand, wanting to crush her throat so she’d never utter vicious words again.

He remembered watching a pregnant Padme struggle as her hands pawed at her neck, trying to release herself from his clutches.

Abruptly, he removed his hand off her neck after seeing those same bulging eyes again, hearing her voice lose its ability to produce sound as she suffocated in silence.

His breaths ragged, panting as he was reminded of how much regret he had about the first time he choked her.

Padme began to cough as she was released. Her entire body felt like it was crumbling under the stress of the attack. She couldn’t swallow her shallow breaths as her shaky hands cradled her neck protectively.

Looking up at him, traumatized by the experience and how painfully hard it hit home, she frantically ran out the door she came through.

Standing there in the hall, she couldn’t quite make it to the apartment. Her heart ached so much it felt like she was stabbed repeatedly in the chest. It all felt too familiar. Her body rested back on the wall for a moment, waiting for the pain to go away.

She began to sink to the floor. A flood of tears collapsed down her cheeks as she held onto her knees, trying to self-soothe.

*You say you want to know him like a lover
And undo his damage, he’ll be new again
Soon you’ll find that if you try to save him
It renews his anger — you will never win*

*And you want three wishes
You want never bitter and all delicious
And a clean conscience and all its blisses
You want one true lover with a thousand kisses
You want soft and gentle and never vicious
And then one you’re saving for a rainy day
If your lover ever takes his love away*

The Pierces — Three Wishes

13. Wreck Me

AN:

Travis Brown: Oh my gosh thank you so much!

Searth: Aw I'm sorry, I know poor Padme :(Yeah it is a dark time right now but it won't always be dark :))

JackRussells: Thank you so much for your review and lovely words. Yeah, Vader is in a very dark place. And I agree, I think Padme is doing the best she can :)

Wreck Me

*We clawed, we chained, our hearts in vain
We jumped, never asking why
We kissed, I fell under your spell
A love no one could deny*

The kids joined Padme at the table for breakfast silently. No words were spoken. Padme couldn't find her voice all morning — she had tuned out ever since she put one of her shawls around her neck to cover up the strangling marks from Vader's metal hand.

"Are we ever going to talk?" Leia suggested, observing the distance between her gloomy mother and brother.

"Huh?" Padme was forced out of her numbing thoughts. "Yeah... Sure, we can talk. . .when you're ready." She did her best to sound optimistic around them despite feeling a lump in her throat.

And still no one could say anything after the explosive fights yesterday. Luke fiddled with his toy skyhopper, while Leia grabbed a bite of her food.

"Why did you lie?" Luke eventually broke the silence.

Padme's eyes skimmed over the twins before returning to her plate of food. "Everything I told you about your father was true. He was a Jedi. He was a war hero — he was all that stuff. And I thought he died. I didn't know. . .until we got here."

"Why didn't you tell us *then*?" Luke's voice was firm, laced with disappointment.

Padme's now glistening eyes couldn't look up at him. "...Because he's not the same man anymore." With a subtle shake of her head, her eyes eventually found his. "He's not him."

“Why did he change?” asked Leia.

Padme felt a heavy breath emerge from her chest, hating every uncomfortable minute of this conversation — she had avoided it for so long.

“...After the war, everybody did. No one was the same.” Padme swallowed a painful gulp in her sore throat. “Your father went down a dark path and. . .he just couldn’t come back from it.”

“Is that why he changed his name?” Leia speculated. “Is that why he’s in a suit?”

“Well, Anaki—” Padme stopped to correct herself — wanting to make a clear distinction for her children. “—Vader made some bad decisions and uh...” She sniveled, trying to take her emotions out of it. “—your uncle Ben wanted to straighten him out and they. . .they got into a fight.”

“A fight?” Luke’s brow furrowed.

“That’s all I know.” She quickly interjected. She couldn’t bring herself to even attempt to explain it in an age-appropriate way.

Luke pondered over his thoughts. “So if I were to ask him—”

“—Luke, y-you don’t have to do this.” Padme urged, nervously. “...I *know* how much you want this. But he is not the dad you’re looking for. He is a dangerous man. You won’t find the good man who was your father. He’s gone.”

“But he wants to get to know me. Shouldn’t I—?”

“—Why?” She cut him off again. “You don’t owe him anything. He left us!”

“He left you...” Luke mumbled, until he saw the grief on his mother’s face. “I’m sorry, mum, I don’t mean to hurt your feelings but. . .if I want to know him, isn’t it up to me?”

Padme covered her mouth with her hand, not wanting them to sense her crippling affliction. She tried to keep a stiff upper lip, knowing that anything she said would just push him further towards Vader.

Luke then got up from the table. It was clear to him the conversation was over, and no good would come from talking about it now. His mother wasn’t ready, and he didn’t want to say the wrong thing.

He then tripped over as he got up, smashing the wing of his skyhopper on the floor after using his hand to break his fall.

“Are you okay?!” Padme got up abruptly to check on him.

“I’m fine.” He winced as he stretched his arm out before taking a look at his toy.

“It’s broken!” cried Leia, eyeing the toy ship.

“Well, when we get home, Obi-Wan’ll fix it.” Padme quickly assured. “Or, we’ll just get you a new one.”

“No.” Luke moved away as his mother tried to reach for him. “I don’t need a replacement. I want this one.”

And Padme knew his animosity towards her wasn't just about the toy. He assumed she wanted to replace any longing he had for a father.

To avoid lashing out, Padme got up and went to her room to take a breather.

*I came in like a wrecking ball
I never hit so hard in love
All I wanted was to break your walls
All you ever did was wreck me*

"She's upset." Leia explained once Padme's door closed.

"I didn't do anything wrong." Luke huffed.

"I think you should talk to her." Leia proposed, taking another bite of her food.

"Ugh. Fine." He groaned. "After I fix this." He dangled his skyhopper at his side.

"How you gonna do that?" She quizzed, looking up at her brother.

Luke's eyes searched the room. "I just need..." He leaned up against the front door, accidentally pushing the button that opened it, realizing it was unlocked. He peered around before his eyes made their way back to Leia.

"There's no one there!" He whispered with a smirk.

"What?" She sat up straight. "No guards?"

Luke shook his head before peering out the door once more. "I'm going!"

"Wait, Luke." Leia got up, rushing to his side. "What if someone catches you?"

"So what?" He shrugged it off. "I'll tell them I'm looking for Vader."

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" Leia's critical eyes passed her brother and peeped outside. Her quick analytical mind running wild.

"Yeah, I don't think he'll hurt me." Luke assured her before stepping out, and closing the door behind him.

Leia anxiously watched her brother leave.

Padme walked back into the room, reading the concerned look on her daughter's face.

"Where's Luke?" Padme folded her arms.

Leia cringed, trying not to bite her fingernail. "Uh..."

Luke walked through the halls, taking very cautious steps as he glanced around. The corridor was completely silent and you just knew that if there were any lurking sounds, you'd

hear them vibrating off the walls — it was clear an echo would reach from one end of the castle to the other.

This made Luke jump when the guards glided over to him. He was sure he'd hear anyone nearby.

One of them ordered Luke to show the toy in his hands. The other murmured something about Luke being one of Vader's prisoners here.

Both were stunned into silence by Vader's breathing behind them. And that sound could be heard a mile away.

"Leave him alone." The dark voice rumbled, and the guards quickly dispersed.

"Luke." Vader turned to the boy. "What are you doing out here?"

"The erm — the door opened and I uh..." His eyes searched the hall before landing on his little ship. "—I was looking for a way to fix my toy." He quickly held it up.

"Come." Vader directed.

*I put you high up in the sky
And now, you're not coming down
It slowly turned, you let me burn
And now, we're ashes on the ground*

Padme opened the door ready to fetch her son but a guard had returned. She didn't need three guesses to figure out who sent one back and why.

"Move." She ordered.

"I don't take orders from you." He established.

"I'm going to get my son." Her stern voice made it clear that nothing and no one was going to intimidate her.

"He's safe." The guard calmly held.

"I said I'm going to get my son. Get out of my way!" Padme yelled.

"Lord Vader will bring him to you." Was the last words she heard before the guard closed the door on her.

Padme's intense inhalations could be heard through the thick walls.

*I came in like a wrecking ball
Yeah, I just closed my eyes and swung
Left me crashing in a blazing fall
All you ever did was wreck me*

“What happened?” Vader observed Luke fiddling with the skyhopper, after bringing him to his throne room. The stronger Luke got in the force, the more connected Vader felt to him. Somehow with this shared ability, they were able to familiarize themselves with one another in a way that Vader hadn’t been able to do with anyone for a long time.

“The wing falls off sometimes.” Luke said not looking up. “My uncle Ben used to fix it for me.”

Obi-Wan. Vader still couldn’t hear his name without flinching, especially after sensing the bond he had with his children.

“Let me see.” He held out his mechanical hand.

“You can’t fix it.” A subtle whine escaped Luke’s lips.

“Let me try.” Vader added.

Luke indolently handed it over. Luke watched him study the toy. Vader’s hands worked away like fixing things was second nature to him.

“...How’s your mother?” Vader began as he inspected the wing of the skyhopper. “Is she alright?”

“I don’t know.” Luke slumped down onto the step. “We’re not really talking.”

“Don’t shut her out.” Vader spoke softly, still wrestling with his memories, including his most recent behaviour. “...Does she hate me?”

“Well, she loved the old you.” Luke sighed, looking up at Vader, who stood beside him. “But she says you’re not him anymore.”

“No, I’m not.” Vader said under his breath. It tortured him to think about. He was not Anakin Skywalker anymore. He didn’t act like him, he didn’t feel like him, and he certainly didn’t look like him. And that’s why it felt like his insides had been kicked out when she said those words: *I’d rather **die** than be your wife.*

Because what she’s really saying is: *I don’t **love** you anymore.*

And he knew she couldn’t love him now. He didn’t deserve it.

He just had this one thing: this one small ray of hope that appears when he looks at his son. Through their connection to the force, maybe Luke can help him remember how it feels to love.

“You know,” Vader began successfully piecing the toy back together. “Once you find out where it fell apart, you can start to repair it. Sometimes it’s just a little crack like here,” he showed Luke the damage to the wing before searching the room for an adhesive. “—a small piece that fell off. . .that you can’t replace. But. . .if you just scrape the roughness of the edges, you’ll find a way to stick it back together — rebuild and. . .strengthen that connection.”

Vader handed back the repaired ship to his son. “And it’ll fit like a glove.”

“You did it!” Luke beamed as he held the toy in his hand. “Thanks.”

Vader shot him a slight nod as he watched Luke begin to fly it around the room. “I’d like to believe that. . .any connection can be fixed, no matter the damage.”

Luke could feel Vader’s presence right behind him. He then met his gaze through the lenses, realizing what the man in the suit was trying to tell him.

“I’d. . .like to believe that too.”

*Don’t you ever say I just walked away
I will always want you
I can’t live a lie, running for my life
I will always want you*

Vader and Luke entered the terrace from the throne room and found Padme sitting outside with a blanket. She quickly wrapped it around her but not before Vader got a look at the marks he left on her neck. He could tell she was hiding her injury from their son.

“Mum.” Luke spoke, solemnly.

Padme couldn’t bring herself to look at them. It was the hardest thing to do to try and give her kids the space to know the man she wanted to keep them away from.

“I’m sorry I disappeared. I won’t run out on you again.” Luke promised.

She let out a sigh of relief that he was home in one piece. “We’ll, uh... We’ll talk later. Just go inside.”

Luke obliged and she held onto her blanket tighter. Even when surrounded by a lava field, she could still feel a chilling breeze — or perhaps it was the shadow of Vader behind her that brought the cold.

“You win.” She eventually muttered, closing her eyes. Her voice was a fragile whisper, robbed of its power. “I’m done fighting you.”

She breathed out a heavy sigh, fatigued. “You want to be mad at me, blame me, point your fingers at everyone but yourself. . .knock yourself out.”

She let out a breath she had seemingly been holding in before it could evoke a tear to her eye.

“Just *please*.” She stressed — begging with such exhaustion in her voice. “Don’t hurt my children.”

Vader’s movements were stilled by the brokenness in her plea.

“I won’t.” He managed to get the words out despite feeling his throat closing up.

She didn’t turn to face him. Her eyes were strictly on the steep mountains but Vader couldn’t leave. He couldn’t bring himself to move — he wanted to fix it. But some cracks

were too rough to soften. The hands (his metal hand) that hurt her cannot be the ones to heal her.

He finally took a step towards her, weakly uttering a plea: “Padme, I—”

“—Please leave me alone now.” Her voice was polite but strong. There was no room for a rebuttal.

But he met her words with hesitation. Unable to pry himself away.

And his hesitance only frustrated her more. “*Please.*” She pressed, curtly.

“Yeah.” Vader acknowledged, honoring her request. He took a heavy breath. “Okay.”

He finally walked away.

Once she heard the door to his throne room close, she allowed the few tears she had left to fall.

*I never meant to start a war
I just wanted you to let me in
And instead of using force
I guess I should've let you win*

Wrecking Ball — Miley Cyrus

14. Cold Surrender

AN:

Mercenary: Yeah :(It's been a whirlwind for her.

Cold Surrender

*Looking up from underneath, fractured moonlight on the sea
Reflections still look the same to me, as before I went under
And it's peaceful in the deep. Cathedral where you cannot breathe
No need to pray, no need to speak
Now I am under all*

*And it's breaking over me
A thousand miles down to the sea bed
Found the place to rest my head
Never let me go, never let me go*

"Lord Vader, your ship is ready." The Grand Inquisitor approached the Dark Lord.

"Good." Vader nodded, gesturing for Luke and Leia to get aboard.

"But sir." The inquisitor interjected, surprised by Vader's choice of guests. "The children?"

"What about them?" Vader grumbled once Luke and Leia were on the ship.

"Nothing." He quickly responded, making a welcoming gesture with his now badly disguised quivering hand. "Carry on."

"You wanna fly it?" Vader turned to Leia who was eagerly observing the controls.

"What?" Leia almost chuckled, caught by surprise. "I've never done that."

"I piloted a ship around your age." Vader breathed out. "Come on, it's easy. I'll show you."

As Vader showed her the ropes, Leia couldn't hide the fact that she felt elated. She was single-handedly responsible for this ship making its way in the air.

"Luke, I'm flying!" She called for him to notice. "I'm doing it!"

"Awesome!" Luke made a beeline for the interface to watch his sister in action.

“Sir, we need to land.” The Grand Inquisitor conscientiously chimed in.

“Why?” Vader’s languid demeanor around the inquisitor made it obvious he was in no mood to deal with him.

“They’ve captured a Jedi sympathizer, he’s detained at the Headquarters. He won’t give us any information on their locations.”

“He won’t reveal any information? Or he doesn’t have any?” Vader quipped.

The ship hit quite a bit of turbulence, causing Leia to shudder in a panic. Vader quickly regained control of the ship, grabbing the piloting controls. A nervous Leia stared absently ahead. Vader noticed her fear as the ship went through irregular motions.

He offered her gentle words of solace. “It’s alright.”

Another tumultuous shift in airflow tested her nerves. She reached out for Vader’s hand in a desperate moment.

He looked down at her small hand on his. And suddenly whatever the Grand Inquisitor was referring to didn’t seem all that important. None of it mattered. Maybe he couldn’t physically feel her hand but he could sense what this feeling symbolized. And it wasn’t his connection to the force that awoke something in him. It was his own flesh and blood connecting to Anakin, who, in this moment, felt like he was looking up from his dark hole buried deep within Vader. Like there was a little fracture that let some light in, glowing on Anakin inside the suit. And he felt her hand reach out for him.

And all the battles in his head, all the battles between the Sith and the Jedi, the Empire and this new underground rebel alliance, all of it was an after-thought right now. He couldn’t remember why he so valiantly fought all these battles. He couldn’t think about anything else now that he felt this innate instinct to protect her — now that she placed her hand in his.

“Most likely the latter, sir.” The Grand Inquisitor interrupted his thoughts.

“Then what would I do with him?” Vader snapped with a careless groan.

“My Lord,” He treaded carefully, trying not to choke on his own words — or be choked. “You normally handle these cases. In fact, you demanded it.” He spoke slowly, the words wrung out of him almost against his will. He didn’t want to have to remind Vader that he sought pleasure from torturing captives, and killing them when they didn’t give him the information he wanted. Sometimes, Vader would kill them *after* they gave him what he wanted.

Sometimes, it wasn’t even about them. Vader just wanted to feel something again. He wanted to feed a depraved desire, he was so desensitized. And he had watched so many people take their last breath that he almost envied them because they got to feel it. He used to intrinsically feel things so deeply, it overwhelmed him.

Vader brushed him off, his eyes shifting from Leia and back at the sky in front of him. “I’m busy.”

*And the arms of the ocean are carrying me
And all this devotion was rushing out of me
And the crashes are heaven for a sinner like me
But the arms of the ocean delivered me*

A guard brought the twins back home. It was sort of an unspoken rule at this point. Padme didn't ask them about their morning with Vader and they didn't mention him.

"Mum, I uh—" Luke began, taking a seat beside her on the couch as she read her book. "I'm really sorry — for yesterday."

Padme looked up from her novel and gazed at her son, feeling a sense of comfort, knowing that he was the same little boy who always advocated for peace — he just needed a little time to process his emotions. "Tell you what," She sighed, putting her book down on the coffee table. "How about we both start with a clean slate, and be honest with each other."

"That sounds good." He smiled up at her before getting up to retrieve his toy skyhopper from one of the floating shelves.

"Hey, you fixed it!" Padme beamed with a cheerful chuckle.

"Dad did." He offhandedly mentioned as he soared his little ship.

Padme struggled to let the words sink in, her upbeat tone quickly fell flat. "You mean Vader."

Luke almost let an involuntary eye roll slip before catching himself, hoping his words would come out in a friendly fashion. "Same thing."

Feeling uneasy, Padme did her best to steady her nerves while she cooked dinner. But even dicing vegetables wasn't cathartic enough to channel her irritation into.

"He's calling him dad." She sat with her own words, reflecting on them begrudgingly.

"You know," Leia crept up behind her, "I think Vader's... trying."

"Sure..." Padme couldn't hide her false amazement. "Trying, controlling... what's the difference."

"Mum..." Leia affectionately called. "Do you... Do you want me to hate him?"

"Oh." Padme took a moment to gather her thoughts. Her daughter's offer made her wonder just how willing Leia was to cultivate an environment that shielded her own mother — and it made her realize they have been doing this for a long time; it became a natural response to their mother's trauma. And she couldn't let them do it for her anymore.

"...No." Padme reassured, smiling at her ever intuitive daughter.

*Though the pressure's hard to take
It's the only way I can escape
It seems a heavy choice to make
And now I am under, oh*

Vader got a good look at Padme and the kids indoors as he stood on the terrace. They had a tray of fruit and he knew they were playing the taste test game that he and Padme used to play. Padme was blindfolded while the kids made her guess what food she was tasting.

"It's... a grape." Padme said confidently.

"You got it!" Leia cheered, removing the blindfold from her mother's eyes.

"Your turn." She handed the blindfold over to her brother, who was impatiently waiting his turn. Padme tied the scarf around his head.

Watching them so immersed in a life that he could have been a part of, Vader realized this was the true curse of the dark side. Once you're in, you're trapped. And it was near impossible to crawl out of the hole you dug up. It envelopes your soul, robbing you of your warmest feelings and ability to have compassion for another, even those you cared about more than yourself. He literally sold his soul to the devil, and he had little hope of ever fully recovering it.

Once the kids were asleep, Padme was just about to turn off the last light when she heard a knock on the door.

"What do you want?" Her effervescent attitude that she had embraced all day was quickly diminished by the sight of Vader.

"I wanted to thank you for letting me see them."

"I didn't have much of a choice now did I?" She derided, about to shut the door in his face.

But he held it open, plastering his hand on it before it could close completely. "And if you did?"

Padme let out an infuriated sigh. "Unfortunately, I'd. . .probably still choose you." Her mocking tone did not go unnoticed as she leaned against the open door. "I have to give in. I can't protect them from you."

Her somber words reflected Owen's wisdom: they'd have to build their own rose garden, she couldn't build it for them. "They'll just. . .have to learn the hard way, and see the cold, heartless man you've become... But trust and believe that I will be there to catch them when you let them down. And you will. . .because you don't feel anything for anybody."

Vader sat with her words, taking a moment to consider them, accepting that she had every right to protect them from him.

“You’re right, I don’t. And not for a lack of trying. I walked through fire — and I don’t care, I have been burned many times... So, yeah, I am cold.” He expressed with a hopeless shrug.

“I am so cold that I’d walk through fire again just to feel something — for I have become numb. I would gladly surrender to anything that would give me something real again, even if it’s pain...” He continued — although, it seemed he was admitting this to himself rather than her. “When you’ve been left to burn by those who love you most, when you’re consumed by the flames that engulfed your insides, when you’ve bled so much that all your blood is now dried and crisp, eventually, you don’t feel the heat anymore.”

Vader forced himself to own his confessions. “I am alone, and the fire that surrounds me has grown cold. I live on a lava-filled planet to feel warmth and yet still. . .nothing. My metal suit presses against my skin and the fire cannot touch me anymore. It has become one with me. I have grown so used to the burning sensation that I have diluted it.”

Padme’s body language implied her discomfort, she shifted as her body closed up, her arms folded, her shoulders rose — his suffering wasn’t something she wanted to remember, especially since it infected everyone else like a contagious disease.

But she allowed herself to hear it, even if it was going to be the only sincere thing that came out of his mouth.

“I am cold all the time...” His dull voice had a jagged edge to it. “And I fear I’ll never feel warmth again...”

Vader’s eyes now intently set on her. “But then I look at you.”

*And the arms of the ocean, so sweet and so cold
And all this devotion I never knew at all
And the crashes are heaven for a sinner released
And the arms of the ocean delivered me*

*And it’s over and I’m going under
But I’m not giving up, I’m just giving in
Oh I’m slipping underneath
So cold and so sweet*

Florence and the Machine — Never Let Me Go

15. Sex, Lies & Politics

Sex, Lies & Politics

“Can I ask you something?” Luke adjured, as Padme pulled his blanket over him, tucking him into bed.

“Sure.” She kissed his forehead.

“Did he. . .did he want us?” Luke’s eyes rose, holding his mother’s gaze.

She sat back on the bed, unfolding the corners of his blanket.

“...He was scared.” She admitted with a sigh. “-really scared about becoming a dad.”

She chuckled as she remembered the look on Anakin’s face when she told him she was pregnant. “But. . .he wanted you guys so much. He couldn’t wait to have a family.”

In some ways it was easier to talk about Anakin and Vader like they were two different people to her children. It was too hard to look at the life they built and the life they crushed and accept that they are the reason they are where they are. Sometimes it felt more like Anakin was possessed by Vader.

*It’s like you’re screaming, and no one can hear
You almost feel ashamed, that someone could be that important
That without them, you feel like nothing
No one will ever understand how much it hurts
You feel hopeless, like nothing can save you
And when it’s over and it’s gone
You almost wish you could have all that bad stuff back
So that you could have the good*

Trying to love a man with such anxiety is like trying to save a man from drowning. He can hold onto you, and you can hold onto him but there’s a chance that in the wave of panic, he will strangle you, taking you down with him.

But when he’s calm, you’re floating, and in those subtle, serene moments, loving him feels like coming up for air.

Padme closed the door of her apartment behind them. She turned to Anakin who was looking at her the way he always looked at her — like he knew the impulses he arouses in her.

“Finally alone.” He grinned. “So...” He casually leaned back against the wall, anticipating the exact moment where they will drop the decorum they have had to display all day around others — albeit not as well as they think. It was illogical to think you wouldn’t be reactive to your lover’s presence in one way or another. There is always a look in your eye when you are overcome with a rush of emotions — especially emotions you try to hide. There is anxiety, excitement, fear, and lust when you approach your secret spouse in public — and even that hesitation becomes obvious to others.

“So...” She repeated, breathlessly, as his steadfast gaze penetrated her. That look demanded too much from her. That shining smile and spark in his eyes washed over her and she didn’t want to wait anymore. They have held it in long enough, seduced by the delaying of desire when surrounded by the world. And it was these little moments that made all the lies and secrets worth it. Now they can escape together, and she couldn’t wait to feel the rough surface of his hands on her.

In one fell swoop, they crashed into each other.

His mouth devours hers, refusing to come up for air. She melts with his tongue in her mouth — she can’t see or think about anything else — she couldn’t even tell you the colours of her own walls in this moment. His hands begin roaming her body, setting off a fire within her. She can feel every rough stroke of his finger, as his hands graze down her thighs. It felt like he had many hands and each cradled every delicate part of her as she fell back into his palms because the fall was just as exciting as the landing — when her body succumbs to his powerful caresses. The ruffled skirt of her indigo gown feels so good against his fingers as he scrunches it up in his fist, lifting it to expose her delectable thighs as the hem of her dress rests on her bare bottom.

She almost collapses as his hands bring a heat to her hips once he grips onto them. She is surrounded by his scent, and is invigorated by the way his lips brush against hers, breathing into her mouth with every urgent kiss, shooting shock waves through her veins.

Her hands run through his hair, pushing any loose dark blonde strands away from his eyes so she could bask in that piercing blue gaze.

Every breath, every touch, every kiss became a torture when their bodies pressed up against each other, teasingly, yet to become one. With a feral urge, he undresses her, and she, him.

Suddenly he picks her up carries her to bed as she throws the last components of his Jedi robes on the floor. Their clothes leave a trail.

Finally, he slumps his body over hers as he lays her down on the bed. They are anxious with fervor, knowing that their united heartbeats and sexual pulses were about to create the most synchronized passion.

Anakin groans as his aching appendage finally rests inside her. He pounds into her, like he’s trying to release all his pent up anger that accumulated throughout the day with each shove of his hips as they align with hers — missing her mouth with each thrust as he tries to engulf himself in amorous kisses. It gets hard to slow down when he so savagely wants the sensation of passion to intoxicate him, take him away from the rest of the world, and let it fade as he and Padme now only see each other.

He welds himself to her the minute he's inside her. Trying to clear his head of the fear that so deeply and so persistently haunts him — that he'll be left alone. Something would take her away — their secret coming out, men like Clovis, or death like in his nightmares. These incessant thoughts never go away until his manhood is immersed in the heart of her femininity, physically owning her — feeling in control.

The feel and sounds of him swimming inside her makes him weak with pleasure. He gazes down at her open mouth, hypnotized by her soft moans that let him know she's satisfied. He wants to focus on her and only her. He can feel her nails softly drag down his back, he can feel her squirming under him. He does not want his anxieties to take him out of this moment.

But it is those anxieties that sharpen his senses. He feels pain deeply, whether real or imaginary — pain he would love to suppress — to numb himself from. But if he did, he'd also rob himself of his ability to feel the most uninhibited ecstasy with her. His anxieties, when channeled in the heat of the moment, sharpen the impulses of desire, resulting in him getting lost in the deluge of euphoria.

When his palpitating erection is submerged in her warm fluid, he feels safe and complete. He finds his strength. His strength to rise, to go out into the harshness of life, go to war, and take on the world. He ravages her harder like his life depended on it because in so many ways it did. He made love to her for survival, to drown out the voice in his head. The dark voice that reiterates his anger every time he feels helpless or like he's spiraling out of control.

He felt like two people. One who could simply savor the moment, devour his wife, obliterate himself in the orgasm, and enjoy the peace that comes after the buildup, from being validated by her — her belief in him, her desire for him. The other watches, criticizes, distracts him from the moment, making him feel desperately lonely, desperate for freedom, desperate for love, desperate for independence. It was confusing — he couldn't have it all. He couldn't claim her in public, he couldn't be free from the Jedi's shackles without giving up his power, and he couldn't keep his power without losing her — and he wasn't going to give her up.

He can't escape the prison he built himself in his mind. He created it. He manages to find something pure about himself and then torments it until it turns him into a state of hypervigilance. He wants to ravish his wife in peace but somehow as he deeply plunges into her, possessing as much of her as he could, it becomes an obsession. An obsession to feel in charge — to grab onto something while the outside world, and his mind, keep spinning uncontrollably.

He wanted to lead his own life. And in between the sheets with her, he gets to lead, to feel that powerful. She allows him to take control of her body. And she is happy to relinquish all control to him in the bedroom. She hated the burden of power at work when she was a queen and now as a senator — which was probably what made her a great leader. She had no desire to exert power over others. So, it felt good to give all of herself to him and let him overpower her. It was a deeper way of exploring their passion for one another. To lay down all your vulnerability on the bed with no filter, risk the exposure of your darkness and imperfections and allow another soul to replenish you — you find a deeper meaning of yourselves and your love for each other, and you are revitalized by a love that consumes you whole... for better or worse. They bear their soul before the other — not realizing how profoundly they have attached themselves to one another, and thus, creating an open wound if one leaves.

If only they could learn to embrace the passion without the drama.

For him, making love to her is how he regains his strength that the world out there depends on, how he frees himself from his own mental prison. For her, being made love to by him is when she feels complete. She screams his name as he devastates her with the most excruciating pleasure, she is dominated by the erotic explosions as he sends electricity traversing through her body.

He is driven to madness, wildness, and animalistic whims as he watches the shape her mouth takes as she sings out his name over and over again.

The urgent pulsations moments before her orgasm is when she feels most alive, most taken care of, and most loved. When his quivering member forces its way in her womb, filling her up, their love becomes satisfying life-changing poetry full of enormous potency. She is protected by his hands grabbing her tightly, one squeezing her butt cheek, the other cradles her head, preventing her from hitting the headboard. She is protected by the full weight of his body almost crushing hers. His hair damp, his sweat drops onto her, her flesh stained in his, bathing in each other's odours, flavour, texture — combining their dreams, promises, satiating an instinctive longing.

She is driven to a state of overwhelming excitement, insanity, surrender, feeling the orgasm seep out of every pore. The aching intensity envelopes her from her head to her toes. Her body violently shudders, tightening around his swelling shaft. She can no longer hear her own lecherous moans. It is replaced by silence, and all that rings in her ears is the throbbing, aphrodisiac elements that cause a stir within. These were the vibrations of freedom, lust, escapism, and love while it is pure and true. They got lost in each other and, in that, they found themselves in each other, finally becoming one.

It makes her feel empty when he pulls out, and the fireworks evaporate once his body moves away and lets cold air pass between them. And he doesn't leave on purpose — the Jedi call him, the Chancellor calls him, everyone pulls him away. And he gets mad that he has to leave, that he has to see the look on her face. Like, there's one more person you can't make happy.

*Yellow diamonds in the light
And we're standing side by side
As your shadow crosses mine
What it takes to come alive*

Anakin rolled off of Padme, taking a moment to catch his breath now lying on his back. He shot her an ardent gaze, soothed by the series of inhalations they whispered as he listens to her heartbeat settle.

It's the most peaceful moment after the eruption of passion, and it was cut short by his comlink.

"It's the Chancellor." He grunted out.

And just like that, Padme went from the highest high to the lowest low.

“Shocking.” Her unamused derision rubbed him the wrong way.

But he kept his voice low to avoid tempers flaring. “Don’t start.”

“Fine, I won’t.” She did her best to speak softly. They only had a couple of days to be alone, she didn’t want them to go to waste.

Anakin reached for her, pulling her back towards him to plant a light kiss on her lips.

But as much as she tried to let it go, she was riddled with agitation; Palpatine had caused controversy among the senators — and she hated that just the sound of his name set her off.

“Did you know he’s been making amendments to the constitution?” Anakin’s parted lips that were just about to be satiated were now hanging out to dry as she moved hers away.

He tried to hide his irritation as she prevented the kiss.

“Can we not talk about this now?” He sighed, meaning the words more seriously than they sounded.

“Yeah, okay. You’re right.” She forced a smile. “It’ll all be fine once we get him to sign the petition.”

And suddenly she could feel Anakin grow quiet.

“What?” She observed him, knowing he was once again shutting her out of whatever was going on in that head of his.

“Nothing.” He mumbled.

She sat upright. No matter how good he thought he was, she knew when he was lying.

“You knew, didn’t you?” She folded her arms against her chest.

His silence confirmed it.

“You knew.” She whispered to herself, shaking her head, coming to the realization.

“Okay, don’t make a big deal out of this.” He held up his hand in protest. But it was too late. She was up and out of bed, wrapping her light blue robe around herself, prancing around the room.

“Oh no, it’s not a big deal at all.” She mocked him. “You only just stood idly by while the Chancellor destroys centuries of democracy.”

“Padme.” He spoke as calmly as he could, feeling a buildup in his chest — trying to manage his short fuse, boiling it down to her pregnancy hormones. “Don’t jump to conclusions. We all want the same thing here. . .to end the war as quickly and as peacefully as possible.”

Padme bit her lip in vexation, trying her hardest to evaluate her words before she went off — finally deciding to just get right to the point.

“Then ask him to let diplomacy resume.” She said sternly.

“Padme, I can’t do that!” He gave off a hopeless shrug, almost chuckling at her request. “Look. . .if I get involved I’d be doing so as your husband. It’s. . .not professional.”

She scoffed, struggling now to keep her cool. “Because you’re always so professional.” Her eyes narrowed into slits. “Like when you almost killed Clovis on our living room floor?”

And she knew she hit a nerve but right now she didn’t care.

“Oh,” He mimicked her mocking tone, meeting her with burgeoning derision as he got up, putting one leg into his black trousers. “You want to talk about professionalism, okay...” He strutted over to her. “What kind of married senator gets all dressed up and invites her ex boyfriend into our living room for a supposed business meeting.”

Padme huffed, realizing it’s always going to be an eye for an eye.

“I apologized for that.” She warned stiffly.

“Well, so did I.” His fierce gaze wouldn’t let up.

She rubbed her eyes. Her fingers were then splayed across her forehead, massaging her temples, as she took a deep breath. “Okay, you know what — let’s just. . .put a pin in this.” She began to head towards him with a calmer approach.

“Anakin,” She uttered breathlessly, “All I’m asking is that you talk to the Chancellor? You’re the closest to him.”

He was still quite rough around the edges and she could feel the tension as he exhaled. But she reached for him anyway, hoping a gentle touch would have him meet her halfway.

“I’m sorry.” He finally drawled. His avoidant eyes now finding her. “But no.”

He began to walk away and a quizzical Padme followed him urgently.

“Why not?” She implored as she chased him through the kitchen.

And he finally snapped. “Because I don’t agree with you!” He blurted out.

He turned to her, her face taut with disbelief — he was now wishing he had kept his mouth shut.

“I just think...” He tried to carefully craft his sentence. “relying on votes and negotiation is going to drag it out. People want to feel secure. The just want the war to be over. This is an easy way to do that. Then we can figure out the semantics.”

She closed her eyes for a moment, not really knowing what to think.

“I don’t know what’s worse...” The words lazily rolled out of her, like any effort would be rendered futile. “The fact that my own husband will gladly stand by while the Chancellor throws away my life’s work, or that he’d abandon his integrity to win a war.”

Anakin tensed up, annoyed by the accusation. He was restless, fighting the instinct to sharpen his words.

He managed to settle for a disappointed shrug, as he groaned out. “Alright — you wanna wreck our night alone together? You go ahead and wreck it.”

He walked off, slamming the bedroom door shut behind him — leaving a dejected Padme to lean on the countertop.

Padme was just about to turn off Luke's night light when her scarf fell from around her neck.

Her son's eyes followed her, quickly propping himself up on his elbows. "What's that?"

"What?" She asked as he pointed at her.

She realized he caught the marks on her neck. She couldn't cover herself up fast enough.

"Is that—" Luke's squinted eyes started to take a wider shape. "Did he...? Did he do this to you?!"

*Shine a light through an open door
Love and life, I will divide
Turn away 'cause I need you more
Feel the heartbeat in my mind*

*It's the way I'm feeling, I just can't deny
But I've gotta let it go*

We found love in a hopeless place

We found Love — Rihanna

16. Dark Side Of The Morning - Part I

Dark Side of the Morning — Part I

*I had a dream
I was high enough
Somewhere along the lines
We stopped seeing eye to eye
You were staying out all night
And I had enough*

*No, I don't wanna know
Where you've been or where you're going
But I know I won't be home
And you'll be on your own*

Padme opened the front door and was met with Vader squaring his shoulders, his head held high, and his hands stretched out by his sides, taking up more space than necessary.

“Where are they?” Vader glanced inside the house looking for the children.

Padme sighed, almost irritated by his confidence — or in this case, arrogance. “They’re not coming.”

“What?” He leaned in as though he hadn’t heard her correctly. He came across demanding as his head protruded forward.

After a moment’s hesitation, she breathed out. “They... They don’t want to see you.”

She surprised herself with how compassionate her tone was, like she cared about how the news would affect him — or perhaps she simply didn’t like giving people less-than-positive news.

She didn’t need to peek under the mask to know that it was tough for him to digest her response. “I want to hear it from them.”

She stepped aside, giving him space to enter the house. With a dismissive wave of her hand, she raised her arm. Her fingers now massaging the nape of her neck, indicating she was too exhausted for any back and forth.

“Don’t come in here!” Luke’s words boomed through the bedroom once Vader stood in the doorway.

Vader took the time to listen, without taking another step. Luke and Leia were on their respective beds. Leia couldn't look up at him, and Luke was in protective mode.

"Why not?" He eventually appealed. Interestingly enough, there was something heartfelt in his voice that could be detected even through a voice synthesizer.

"Because!" Luke bared his teeth, taking umbrage with Vader's persistence. "—we're done. We're done with you."

Vader could feel the agony in Luke's words. Luke was struggling, trying to be strong for his mother and sister. Even Vader was speechless for a second, trying to grapple with what he was feeling.

"I thought you said—" Vader paused, like he was about to fumble his words. "—you said you believe that any connection can be fixed."

Luke averted his gaze. "I did... But then I saw what you did to my mother. Now get out!" The volume of his voice increased by the time he shouted out his last words.

*Who's gonna walk you through the dark side of the morning?
Who's gonna rock you when the sun won't let you sleep?
Who's waking up to drive you home when you're all alone?
Who's gonna walk you through the dark side of the morning?*

*It ain't me, no no
It ain't me, no no*

Vader headed back into the living room. Padme sat on the couch uncomfortably. Her arms folded across her upper body after hearing every word that was spoken in the room.

He trudged over to her. He seemed to be staring at her, but his eyes weren't really focused on anything.

"You told them?" He muttered slowly, hopelessly.

"No." She said gently, reluctantly looking up. Her eyes quickly returned to the coffee table in front of her. "Luke saw the scars."

Vader turned away from her, and all she could hear was his sharp breaths. He felt ashamed. Abashed that she had to endure hiding it, and that his son had to see it.

"...Doesn't matter." He eventually mumbled to himself. "It's my fault... I did it. I did it all."

He lowered himself onto the couch, his heart, or what's left of it, in his stomach. Padme discreetly moved an inch away, her shoulders rising, making herself small.

"I've failed everyone I ever loved." The words dragged out of him, as though he had never admitted it to himself until now. His tedious pitch echoed a sense of guilt.

"I just couldn't stop myself." He finally huffed. His voice a vague combination of sadness and self-ridicule. "I keep going over it all. Wondering if things would be different — if I did things differently...?"

His rhetorical question now made his dull eyes film over, glass-like mist fills his mask. Padme didn't know what to say. She didn't want to get involved.

"But it was just fate." He finally rested back on the sofa.

Padme did her best to ignore his words but she couldn't help feeling mildly rattled — hating the resurgence of painful experiences. She was worn out, physically and emotionally.

Her lips drawn in tightly, because if they didn't, they'd part, and all her sadness would pour out. And she didn't want to start the flood. She was sick and tired of the dead-end road they kept driving into.

"If you loved me... *If* you truly loved me, you would've stopped yourself." Her body couldn't offer anything more than a defeated shrug. "And stayed with me — been with me. You wouldn't have lost yourself in your ambition."

Vader was silenced. His head down, his shoulders drooped forward.

It took him some time to find his voice, making sure he didn't stutter his words. "...Do they hate me too?"

Padme's fingers brushed against her lips, as her elbow rested on her crossed arm — she sighed deeply.

"They don't hate you." She found herself allowing him some peace of mind. "They're. . .afraid of you."

Vader sat with her words for what seemed like an eternity to Padme. She awkwardly caught a glimpse of him from the corner of her eye, as his lenses seemed to be burning a hole in the ground.

Accepting his fate, he got up.

She watched him leave and she felt a familiar urge come up — one she detested when it came to him — yielding to her unwavering sympathy, wanting to knock some sense into herself for feeling sorry for him at all.

"Wait." She groaned at the sound of her own voice, rolling her eyes at her impending actions.

"...I have an idea."

*I had a dream
We were never growing up*

*Summer nights I'll take with me, and the memories
But you know I'm gonna leave behind the worst of us*

Kygo & Selena — It ain't me

17. Angel Of The Morning - Part II

Angel of the Morning — Part II

*There'll be no strings to bind your hands
Not if my love can't bind your heart
There's no need to take a stand
For it was I who chose to start*

*Maybe the sun's light will be dim
And it won't matter anyhow*

Padme held the patio door open, with a picnic basket in hand, for Luke and Leia to pass through. Leia carried the cups while her brother grabbed the blanket.

Once the twins stepped foot outside, they stood motionless at what awaited them — or, rather, who awaited them.

Occupying the space in the middle of the terrace, was Vader.

“What’s he doing here?!” Leia jumped down her mother’s throat, demanding an answer.

“Well,” Padme said casually. “I thought we could all hang out... *Together.*”

Before the dust could settle, a “No!” came screaming out of Leia as she ran back inside.

Padme rubbed her forehead with a hopeless look in her eyes, pushing a loose strand of her hair back in the process. From the outside, Padme might have come across quite blasé with her eyes almost drooped shut. But the truth was, it was just so mentally taxing to deal with it all, and she hated seeing her kids have to endure the same emotional struggles.

She turned to Luke, wondering whether there was a chance that one of her kids would be open to the opportunity. But Luke huffed in response to her unspoken request.

“I’m with Leia.” He confessed, offhandedly, following his sister to their room.

Vader remained in his spot, not really knowing how to react, hiding his disappointment. He looked over at Padme, who sighed sluggishly.

“Give us a second.” She commented as she headed inside.

“Wanna talk about it?” Padme gradually entered the room. Both her children sat on Luke’s bed — Leia with her arms folded and Luke fiddling with one of his toys.

Padme was met with nothing but irritable exhales.

“Wanna try using your words?” She tried again, joining them at the foot of the bed.

“He ruined everything!” Leia belted out. “Just when we were starting to...” Her voice trailed off and Padme could see her daughter was mourning the bond she had made. It was hard for Leia because she wasn’t as vocal about her own pain as her brother. She swallowed a lot of it down while he allowed himself to be more vulnerable. Being so closed off, it took her longer to open up to the possibility of a relationship with her father and it hurt that much more when he let her down.

Padme took her daughter’s hand in hers. “This doesn’t have to be it.”

Leia’s eyes were downcast, and Luke just shook his head.

“After what he did to you, it’s over.” He hissed.

Padme got comfortable, lying across the end of the bed, leaning up on her elbow.

“I appreciate all this very much.” She spoke with gratitude. “But you don’t have to protect me.”

Padme’s gaze traveled over both of them. “If you wanted. . .my issues with him don’t have to be your issues.”

“Why are you defending him?” Luke blurted.

“I’m not.” Padme assured, calmly. “Look... I’m not going to lie to you, your father has done some terrible things. But. . .he also gave me two of the most important things in my life.” She pointed her finger at each of them, playfully swirling it in circles, with the intent of getting them to crack a smile and to see those sets of bright white teeth.

“So,” She continued. “—maybe you can get something meaningful out of this too.”

They looked like they were taking in their mother’s words but their voices failed them.

Padme didn’t want to push them further. “...You don’t have to do anything you don’t want to do.” Her eyes flickered from one child to the other, hoping they felt comfortable enough to open up to her. She didn’t want them to bottle up any more emotions than they already have.

Both twins’ gazes finally collided with their mother’s.

“But you’re upset.” She admitted. “You feel like you lost something?”

They both quickly looked away. Silence hung between them.

“Maybe that means you had something to lose.” Padme did her best to make sure her delivery was as gentle and nourishing as can be. “So whatever you had with him, it’s up to you if it’s worth fighting for.”

“They’re not ready.” Padme affected a compassionate tone, as she rejoined Vader on the terrace. “Give them some time.”

“Thanks for trying.” He replied earnestly. His gaze trained on her. “You didn’t have to.”

"I know." She spoke with a lazy drawl.

Vader took a couple of wandering steps around the terrace, his hands tucked under his cape — and it was eerily familiar. For a second, she pictured Anakin and how he'd lug himself around with his hands buried in the sleeves of his cloak when conflicted.

"...Do you think some things are just unforgivable?" He finally stopped meandering.

"I don't know. Honestly." She shrugged, traipsing around a bit herself. 'But I hope that even in your worst moments, there's some good in there.' Her eyes met his mask before fluttering up and down his suit, wearily. "I have to believe that. . .for their sake."

He found himself instantly heading towards her. His stare steadfast, as his eyes roam down her body leisurely, taking in her tight curves. She couldn't sense his eyes softening under the mask.

He leaned forward, invading a bit of her space, close enough to make her want to step back — but she didn't. Instead her eyes made their way up to his lenses, struggling to move away — slightly fearful, uptight and confused.

After a second of hesitation, he fingers grazed her neck as he brushed her hair back behind her shoulder, scooping it off her neck. She stood completely still, anchored by his touch. But she couldn't hide her nerves. The last time she felt the leather fabric of his gloves against her flesh, he deprived her of air.

He got a good look at her neck, his eyes glued to the now fading marks that were his own doing, and he felt sick.

"I'm sorry." He finally released. His finger drawing across the most obvious blemish. "I know it doesn't mean much. . .but for what it's worth, I never meant to hurt you."

She couldn't appreciate how feathery light his touch was. She hated his hand lingering over her collarbone. But what she hated most of all was how it unraveled her. She felt like she was coming apart at the seams.

"I don't want to hurt you." His voice dropped.

"I know." The sound that came out of her was barely above an exhale. She could hear the uneven cadence in her breaths. "You don't mean to. But you *do*." She found the courage to tear his hand away.

With a subtle nod of compliance, he gave her space and left.

Her fingers stiffly grazed the spot he had caressed on her neck, feeling vulnerable and exposed. Her eyes fell closed upon hearing the door to his throne room shut behind him.

*Just call me angel of the morning, angel
Just touch my cheek before you leave me, darling*

Then slowly turn away

I won't beg you to stay

With me

Juice Newton — Angel of the Morning

18. What Is To Become Of Me

AN:

Selenese and Travis, so sorry I didn't get to your reviews earlier but I appreciate them a lot! They made me so happy! Xo

What Is To Become Of Me

Padme couldn't sleep at all that night. Every time she tried to distract herself, memories of the old Anakin would interpose between her thoughts. Her imagination kept carrying her back to transcendent, wondrous, dangerous times in spite of her annoyance. She wished she could think about anything else — literally, anything else. Because if she couldn't keep fragments of the excruciatingly divine moments of her life at bay, they'd drown her in a waterfall — attacking her, absorbing her until she had no other option but to sink into it entirely.

She almost mourned her sense of reason as she lied awake in bed.

Anakin and Padme lie awake on the bed, skin to skin as they efface the war for one morning.

"Ani, I want to have our baby back on Naboo." She began. He props himself up on his elbow, his gaze landing on her pregnant belly.

"Why?" He asked as the reverent touch of his fingers rub against her baby bump.

"It's hectic here." She contemplated. "The more I think about it, the less I want to stay. Kids need somewhere safe, healthy, stable... They need structure, discipline."

His eyes skim hers to her perfect pout. He inclines his head towards hers, and his face cracks into a smirk. "I can discipline you if you'd like."

"Anakin." She blushes, rolling her eyes at his charming yet cavalier attitude.

"Okay," He accepted. His word sounding like the most endearing but perfunctory apology.

And then he smiled at her. A smile that turns a mundane, colourless day into a cloudless, vibrant sky. "We'll go."

"Yeah?" She beamed up at him, pleasantly surprised by how quickly he agreed to uproot.

"Mhmm." A hoarse, slight moan escaped his lips, as he playfully pinched her chin. "Whatever you want... I'll give it to you." He sighed, distracted by her mouth.

His thumb brushes along her bottom lip. “I’ll take care of you.”

He was determined to give her the world. But all she wanted was him. Her fingers wrap around his wrist, her thumb circling the inside of it. The most innocent swirls could evoke such excitement, such meaning, heat, and peace all at the same time. She pulls his thumb off her lip so their hands can entwine. But she quickly noticed his battle wounds.

“What happened here?” She asked gently, her hands lose their flexibility as she identifies a cut and scrape against her fingertips.

“Don’t worry about it.” He assured, brushing it off. He tightly interlaces his fingers with hers.

She brings his hand back to her mouth and her lips lightly touch one finger after another, her tongue stroking his scars — letting him know that she’ll take care of him right back.

He leans in to replace his finger with his mouth, giving his whole body to the kiss before supporting his torso with his arms stretched out on either side of her.

She has to take a breath as she looks up at him in all his glory. It should be illegal to tease her in this way. His eyes cast an irresistible spell on her as they probe into her. She scans his body above her, enthralled by one loose hair strand that didn’t fall with the rest when he ran his fingers through it. Her finger traces over the large vein in his arm, as the view of his defined shoulders parts her lips. Her hands lavish him with attention, from his hips all the way up to his collar bone, loving every edge, every muscle — swept up in his virility.

And she was certain that he knew how handsome he was as he leered at her. His lips vibrate against hers as he says her name — he smirks against her mouth, knowing the soft raspy edge of his voice arched her back. If he uttered her name one more time that would be it — she would do anything he asked of her.

He flips her over — feeling woozy for a moment when he looked down at her bottom perfectly positioned in front of his pelvis. He wiped the corner of his mouth with his knuckles, making sure he didn’t drool over her. He wanted to vulgarize her angelic curves that leaned against his stomach.

His finger drags over her centre, checking that she was wet and ready for him. She yelps as the finger that was in her mouth moments ago was now making her thighs squeeze together. He tantalizes her, controlling her pleasure with just one finger, playing her like a violin.

He rests his chin above her buttocks, and his breath blowing on her back has her aching for him, soaking wet for him. And he could no longer curb his impatience — he was unrestrained, perverted, inflammable. He kneels up, and she feels him harden behind her — he rewards her with his engorged package. She’s compelled by the animal in him, dying to be the object of his dominance, obscenity, masculinity.

His crude hands yank her legs back a bit, allowing himself to collapse over her, their bodies fitting together like two spoons. He adores the soft texture of her hair in his face, as he nuzzles into the back of her head. He then buries her face in the pillow when raw salacious sounds escape her mouth.

Her hair a wild tumble, her arms stretch out on either side, scrunching up the sheet in her fists as she's flaring up. His hand devotes time to her breast before finding her neck. His inhalations are in her ear, making her neurotic as he wraps his fingers around her neck, forcing her head to fall back on his shoulder.

His lips press against her cheekbone, grunting out, succinctly, demandingly, "You're mine."

"Say it." He urges in a gravelly voice.

"I'm yours." She cries, her face glowing with gratitude.

And he freed her. She is devoured by a wild fever followed by a lull of wholeness, tranquility.

He taught her that it was okay to sometimes seek pleasure, be selfish, to put yourself first. A former queen always had to be stoic, a symbol of stability for her people — but Anakin let her emotions roam free around him, she could wear her heart on her sleeve, much like him. They shared the emotional support both of them had always craved. She was strengthened by his love.

She learned to balance her desires and her responsibilities — something he never quite learned to do the same way.

She could then set out into the world with a boldness, a daring confidence, a belief that one person could change the world. In many ways, love made her a better senator because she made time for herself. There was a face she showed the public, one she reserved for her family, a face for her friends, and one for her colleagues. But only he knew it all. He loved it all. He saw the sides of her no one else understood — the face she showed no one.

Even Sabe, who knew her better than her mother and sister, thought she was crazy for marrying Anakin, and ultimately brushed it off as Padme's rebellious side being drawn to his intensity. But with him she could fully be herself. A woman, wholly, unapologetically. A sensual woman. A layered woman. He gave her the life she always wanted — even if only in snippets. A life full of exuberance and charm. She was imaginative, idealistic, and now she got to thrive in an environment that nurtured all those parts of her. And she knew the spirit of her beliefs would trickle down generations. And someday her babies will continue her legacy — because hope and love never die out.

Vader's eyes flew open after indulging his imagination. He wriggled about, hating the constraints of wires holding him up while his body was sanitized. Tied to his machines, he waited for his suit to be assembled. He couldn't think clearly after his latest daydream. It was more than a memory and more than some lewd fantasy — it was the reminder of a sacred, intimate relationship — one that blinded you with the mere sight of your lover, one that dealt with the ebb and flow of sensitivity. It was a fragile obsession that remained wordless. No matter how deep it penetrates, it is, like most things, destroyed by betrayal — and is now unequivocally unattainable.

The soft pitter-patter Vader heard as Luke knocked on the door of his throne room made his heart skip a beat. It was the most delicate sound. He opened it to find two little faces looking up at him, slightly coy in their demeanor.

Luke nudged his sister, persuading her to do the talking — like it was a challenge she had to overcome. She had to express her vulnerability fully.

“We, uh—” She paused, glancing at an encouraging Luke before turning to Vader. “We were wondering if you’d like to train with us...”

All they could see, from their perspective, was a robotic form. Nothing but the sounds of his emphasized breaths indicated that there was anyone in there. But underneath the dark lenses were a pair of eyes moved by the gesture.

Padme spotted the three of them outside, dabbling in their skills with the force as they stood in a circle, passing a small ball through the air from one person to the other.

She glided over to them with a curious strut, touched by the adoring faces of her children and their small fits of giggles.

Vader felt her presence behind him, basking in the warm breeze she unknowingly sent his way.

“You two go ahead.” He suggested to the twins as he joined Padme’s side, making sure to leave a fair amount of space between him and her. “...You did a great job with them.”

Padme stared ahead at her children, grateful that she finally saw them smile. And even more grateful that he made them smile as opposed to the alternative.

“I didn’t want them to be part of this world.” She thought out loud, impressed by their natural talents as she watched them. “I didn’t want them learning anything about the force... I hadn’t gotten over it — the fear — knowing its capabilities. But. . .I was only a few years older than them when I decided I wanted to serve my planet. And I’m sure my parents were afraid for me. They didn’t understand it. . .but they never held me back. They never got in the way. So I guess. . .I’m learning that I don’t need to understand it. If it’s their destiny, I have to trust them — trust that I did enough to ground them when the seductive pull of power rears its head.”

“They’re lucky to have you.” Vader acknowledged. “...I know first-hand how powerful your love is.”

Padme needed a minute to absorb what he said, it left a bittersweet taste in her mouth. “And still it wasn’t enough...”

Her words didn’t come across bitter at all. In fact, quite the contrary — they were full of acceptance.

“It was.” He murmured, thoughtfully, turning to face her. “I just. . .got lost somewhere...”

Vader looked Padme up and down, admiring her, taking his time to memorize her body. She could feel his stare lingering on her, and she finally looked his way.

His gaze holds hers and he places one foot in front of the other. He approaches her, taking off his helmet, displaying his 22 year old self. His dark blonde hair falls into waves, hitting his neck.

She finds herself meeting him halfway. Her tan tunic and leggings now morphed into a long blue gown that imitated a torrent of rich water. The japon snippet her husband gave her worn around her neck. Her hair that was slicked back into a low bun was now set free, flowing down her back — symbolic of a carefree existence. The dark chestnut color of her hair amplified by the white blossoms that appeared in her tousled curls — they were small lightweight flowers that you'd find at a funeral.

They meet in the middle of the terrace, close enough to breathe each other in. His eyelids lower, settling on her lips. He tilts his head to the side, his lips searching for hers.

Bending her head back as he forced his mouth on hers, she swiftly recognized the gradation of intensely delicious kisses. She is surrounded by his arms wandering her back, her hands find themselves in his hair. Her head swivels from one side to the other, loosely, like she couldn't hold her head up if her lips weren't stuck to his, blindly following wherever his led. It felt like gravity was a myth, as he began to sway her back and forth. She can no longer feel her feet touch the floor. Her arms flail about in a sense of abandon as he carries her, swinging her all the way around. They were rising in the air, as he clasps the back of her head, holding her close so he could deepen the kiss. She clings onto him now, helplessly, her body sinking from the wild tremors taking hold of her. There's a surge of giddiness, urgency, vertigo, and magic as they float together and his insistent tongue keeps her mouth open — salivating over each other, tangled up in their all-consuming love.

Vader and Padme watched as the ghosts of their former selves, locked in a passionate embrace, fade away into the air like smoke. They both turn back to face each other once their imagination ceases to exist — and reality strikes. Padme is still stood across from him at a distance, back in her restrictive tan clothing, with Vader back in his armour.

And they are aware that they're mourning the same dream.

Divenire — Ludovico Einaudi

(There are no lyrics to this song but every time I heard it, I pictured the imaginary kiss scene here at the end of this chapter, so I knew it was the one!)

19. The Willow Symbolism

AN:

Mercenary: Ahh I'm glad! Thank you so much xo

Guest: Oh yay! Thanks a lot xo. I'm so happy you're enjoying it so far! Yeah, I'm sure other fics are probably more star wars-y than mine :D but I like to write in my style. I'd say this one is actually more like the world's worst custody battle lol

Willow

*Rough on the surface, but you cut through like a knife
And if it was an open-shut case
I never would've known from that look on your face
Lost in your current like a priceless wine*

Padme opened up her front door to find Vader standing with a bottle of wine in hand.

"It used to be your favourite." He handed the bottle over.

"Still is." She told with warm eyes, accepting the gift.

He made slow strides to the couch as she took the bottle to the kitchen. He was immediately joined by Leia standing in front of him as he sat down beside Luke.

"Your hair looks nice." He observed his daughter's slicked back hair buns just above her ears. He then glanced at Padme and back to Leia — she was her mini-me.

"Thanks!" She quickly replied, giddy with delight about her and her mother's matching hairstyles. "Mum did it."

"Your mother always has nice hair." He agreed with a nod.

Padme returned from the kitchen. "So did you once."

He cocked an eyebrow at Padme, who now sat on the armchair beside them. He noticed a half smirk appear from the corner of her mouth. "Hitting me where it hurts."

Padme tried not to grin.

"You did love your hair." She shook her head, mocking him softly.

"I had a full head of hair!" He playfully argued.

Luke looked up at Vader, his brow furrowed. “You don’t have any hair?”

Padme fidgeted awkwardly as she heard her son’s innocent query. To tell your children their father was injured in a fire was hardly an easy conversation to have.

Vader moved an inch forward, bringing Leia’s curiosity to the forefront as well. “I don’t have eyebrows either.”

Leia winced, and Padme sighed inwards. “Don’t scare ’em.”

Leia, unable to quieten her inquisitive mind, stood in between her father’s knees, observing his suit.

She placed her little hand on his chest, while Luke hovered beside him, hanging off his arm. Padme couldn’t avert her eyes. It was heartwarming to see the look on her kids’ faces now that they were able to revive this connection. It was very meaningful, natural — like they had known him all their lives. They weren’t shy around him. In some ways, what they went through with him ripped off the bandaid so there was no need to tiptoe around each other or play this cumbersome dance in regards to what to do or say. There was this raw honesty between them — accepting the flaws of their paternal bond.

“What do these buttons do?” Leia asked, her finger dragging down his chest.

“They switch up his voice.” Padme couldn’t help herself. She quickly pursed her lips, trying not to break into laughter.

Vader looked over at her, and she knew he went from unimpressed and underwhelmed by her bad joke to finding her humor endearing in a wonderfully silly way. He also noticed her smile lines were more pronounced as she got older, and that made him happy, knowing she still had things to smile about in the last decade.

He held her gaze, and suddenly she could feel him flash her a smile behind the mask, appreciating her mischievous remark — almost chuckling at it himself, and remembering how they used to laugh together.

“They help me breathe.” He corrected — speaking to his children but not taking his eyes off Padme and her deliciously pleasant smile.

While Luke and Leia didn’t give it much thought, his words left Padme ruminative, and her smile faded.

“I better. . .get started with dinner.” She got up speedily, and out of his eyeline.

“Luke, Leia!” Padme called as she placed a salad bowl on the dining table. “Come and set the table.”

They both groaned, not wanting to leave the couch or end their time with Vader.

“Maybe. . .your dad can help you set up.” She suggested with a faint smile. Vader inhaled deeply, cherishing the fact that she referred to him as dad to the kids.

Padme and the twins finally took their seats with Vader pushing both the kids' chairs closer to the table.

"You're not gonna eat with us?" Leia asked as Vader headed to the door that led to his chamber. She hadn't really thought it through, she just wanted him to stick around.

His gaze traveled over the dining table with homemade food, to their three faces.

"I can't." He replied in a courteous manner before leaving.

Both Luke and Leia dug into their dinner as Padme sat there, abstracted, serious, lost in thought.

She swiftly stood up. "I'll be right back."

*Life was a willow and it bent right to your wind
I could feel you sneaking in
As if you were a mythical thing
Like you were a trophy or a champion ring
And there was one prize I'd cheat to win*

*Wait for the signal, and I'll meet you after dark
Show me the places where the others gave you scars*

Vader's posture stiffened, stunned as Padme entered his chamber.

"What are you doing in here?" He blurted.

"I brought you food." She lifted the plate hesitantly after being met with an unenthusiastic greeting.

"Thanks." He muttered. "—just set it over there." She followed his finger pointing to the desk on the right side of her.

Placing down the meal, she turned back to him. She could feel the awkwardness and she knew he wanted her to leave — but she decided to weather the tension.

"How do you eat?" She quietly asked.

A rigid Vader took a second before he could answer. "Well. . .I get everything I need from this." He pointed at his suit. She could hear a slight tremor in his otherwise controlled voice. 'And. . .in here,' He now gestured to the chamber as a whole. "—where I'm not dependent on the suit."

Padme studied his suit, working out the mechanics in her head. "...Show me."

"No." He cleared his throat.

But she urged herself forward, carefully, as to not sneak up on him.

He watched her hands reach for him, and flinched the closer her fingers got to his mask.

He quickly stopped her, his metal hands encircled her wrists lightly, lowering her arms.

After some consideration, he swallowed a gulp and proceeded to remove his helmet himself.

As the helmet was lifted over his head, a shaky exhale left Padme's lips. Her eyes settled on his face — his real face.

She sucked in a nervous breath as her eyes explored his charred skin, getting to see the extent of the damage from the fire.

A tightness gripped her throat as an onrush of grief made her eyes sting with tears. Her body began to tremble, trying to identify him under the burns.

After a sequence of unsteady breaths emerged, she managed to loosen her constricted muscles that stilled her movement.

She quickly wiped away a tear before it could fall down her cheek, hurriedly taking her attention back to the food on the desk.

"Here." She dried her eyes, grabbing the plate. "Try this." She said, her voice cracking.

He didn't move a muscle for a second, hating every dreadful minute of this. But eventually he took the plate from her, albeit reluctantly.

"What do you think?" She asked once he tasted a bite. She kept her voice low, as though she'd irk him or scare him away with any sudden movement or sound.

"A bit salty." He casually grumbled.

She knew what he was doing — trying to pass off any discomfort with a snide remark or joke. The same way he used to nonchalantly gripe about his dislike of sand, using humor to diminish the pain behind what his words really meant — the dark emotions he wanted to cover up. He wanted to reduce the impact of an overwhelming trauma, minimizing how much pain he was really in because it scared him to admit. He had lost too much to have her dangle her warmth before him only to leave again.

But she didn't care. In this moment, she didn't care how indifferent he came across, or how offhanded his comment was. All she could think about was how overwhelmed she was — now that she heard him speak.

She heard the sound of his real voice. That distinctive voice. And she could recognize that soft tone with a rasp anywhere.

"I told you many times," He shrugged with an air of playfulness. "—easy on the salt."

She closed her eyes, chucking to herself with a shake of her head. She whined lightheartedly: "Shut up, Anakin."

Suddenly, silence befell the room once she let his former name slip. It just rolled off her tongue in a moment that felt like home. Like no time had passed since they were frolicking in the kitchen of her old apartment. It was like they had entered a time capsule.

Her eyes slowly raised back to him, and a smile graced her lips. There was *another* familiarity, staring back at her was his eyes. They were the same clear, cool blue eyes that she used to wake up to.

She saw him — really saw him beneath all the scars.

And he was overcome with emotion at the sight of her smile, getting to witness it with his own eyes. And hearing her sultry voice uttering his actual name felt like music to his ears. It was spoken with such affection, embodying the softness and admiration that would come from her when she used to call his name, in a way that made him feel forever revered.

Heat flooded his cheeks for the first time in a long time.

“It’s. . .really good.” He finally added, gesturing at the food. His voice gracious with appreciation. It had been quite a while since he received anything to eat other than bland dishes.

She smiled gently at him. “Well, if you *want*. . .there will be a meal — same time, everyday.”

*The more that you say, the less I know
Wherever you stray, I follow
I’m begging for you to take my hand
Wreck my plans, that’s my man
You know that my train could take you home
Anywhere else is hollow
I’m begging for you to take my hand
Wreck my plans*

That’s my man

Willow — Taylor Swift

20. One Last Time

AN:

Jaenelle Masen: Yeah! it would be nice to give Vader a better suit — or would you want him out of a suit if he could survive that way? xo

Dani Cr: Thank you for your review! xo

Mercenary29: Sorry I was away so long! I'm back though :D Thank you for your continued support! xoxo

EmmaKate:18: Wait no more :D Here ya go! xo

One Last Time

*I was a liar, I gave in to the fire
I know I should've fought it, at least I'm being honest
Feel like a failure, 'cause I know that I failed you*

*And I know, and I know, and I know that you got everything
But I got nothing here without you*

Padme overheard Vader telling the children a bedtime story as he tucked them into bed. He tended to focus on stories about the force and why it should never be underestimated. But tonight was the first time he told them a more personal story — about how he won a pod race at their age.

“They asleep?” She asked as Vader closed the door behind him.

He nodded.

“Good.” She replied with a smile, unfailingly polite. They both stood there, holding each other’s gaze — feeling slightly nervous, edgy yet warm.

“Hello beautiful.” Anakin found Padme on the balcony when he arrived home a couple of hours after her.

Padme shot him an adoring grin, and he motioned with his hand for her to come to him. So she did.

Walking over to where he stood, in the doorway, was the most exhilarating, comforting moment she had experienced in a while. He had been dealing with the Outer Rim sieges for so long, she had imagined what it would be like when he returned. Some days she was afraid he wouldn't return but it was too much stress on her pregnancy to dwell on thoughts like that. There was a tingling sensation in her stomach with each step that brought her closer to him. And finally, his arms gathered her and his eyes fixated on her mouth.

Leaning his nose on hers, he held her tightly, sinking his fingers in her hips, he reveled in the chance to touch her the way he wanted now that no one was around — to make up for lost time — to soak up her scent — to breathe in her inhales and soon, her moans.

"I've dreamt of getting you alone — all to myself." His mouth was so close to hers, she could practically taste his words. She pressed her lips together, moaning out a soft hum of satisfaction as she closed her eyes. Her breasts squished between them as their lips finally touched.

This was the only saving grace in the war, that he could come home to her, his safe space. The only other person in his life that showed him the same nurturing qualities his mother did. He had projected the same kind of emotional attachment that he had with his mother onto her. Because she was slightly older than him, she was able to take care of him the way he needed.

Her unconditional love made her so easy to talk to. And it was refreshing for her to see someone boldly express their vulnerability honestly. She was touched by his trust in her; it gave her the strength to open herself up to him too.

She knew him — and he knew her.

He could tell her everything, every thought, every feeling, every desire, and she never judged his darkest traits. She understood that he was terrified of being that same little helpless 9 year old, who couldn't protect his mother from abuse, or any of the people who had control over them when they were slaves — those who abused the power they had. Anakin was left to believe that the only way to defeat them was to gain power too.

And now, in Padme's arms where he felt safe, he felt strong. And he needed that — because he never wanted to feel like the helpless kid who can't protect those he loved ever again.

"You're still the most beautiful woman." Vader voiced as he kept her gaze.

This was the moment everyone takes for granted. The moment they want to be fleeting — the anticipation before you get what you want. That was how he felt all those years ago when he came home from the war, wanting to rush it, to immediately gratify his impulses. But now that things weren't going to end the same way they did that night, all he could do was remember the moment and the feeling that came with it. And he was quite fond of it now. He almost wished he took his time a bit more back then, slowed down a little, stopped cutting corners, stopped craving excess and falling into the trap of overindulgence — and valued peace instead of thriving on drama, escapism. .frenzy. If he weren't so concerned with instant gratification, he would've had more time to treasure the moment before it was over.

“And you’re still in my dreams. . .every night.”

Padme was left astonished — for a split-second she saw Anakin’s face as Vader spoke. His confession made her feel the same way it did back then — only this time, the words weren’t as light and airy, embellished with excitement, eagerness, and fantasy, as they once were. There was a weight to them now like they were a burden for him, a tragedy. And even for her, they were more bitter than sweet.

A tear rolled down her cheek and without thinking, she rushed over and placed her arms around his waist.

“I miss you.” She mewed, mournfully, her face buried in his chest.

Her hug took him by surprise. It took him a minute to acknowledge what was happening but he eventually reciprocated the hug.

“I miss you too.” He whispered.

She gradually pulled away, accepting this as a moment of weakness.

They were both left feeling a little disoriented after the embrace.

He took that as his cue to leave.

She wiped her eyes, unable to look at him as he walked away.

Once he reached the door, though, he paused, facing her again.

“Padme.” He said weakly, causing her to look back up. His voice quiet, soft. “Come be with me. Just this once.”

Her lips parted as her eyes landed on the black glove waiting for her hand.

*I don't deserve it, I know I don't deserve it
But stay with me a minute, I swear I'll make it worth it
Can't you forgive me? At least just temporarily
I know that this is my fault, I should have been more careful*

She followed him to his chamber and watched him take his seat. She observed the machines around him, removing his helmet, his suit — everything but his mechanical arms and legs.

She could hear her heart in her chest and her breathing felt abnormally loud in this cold, quiet room. She was nervous as she looked at his naked body — it was devastating seeing how little of him remained. But her misty eyes smiled once she found his and saw something familiar. Realizing how vulnerable he must be feeling as he puts himself out there, she drowned out her own anxieties. Her thoughts became blurred as he drew her towards him.

She pulls herself up onto his lap. A symphony of inhalations were shared between them — unsteady and fragile, anxious. She could feel him trembling under her with anticipation as he

felt her voluptuous thighs straddle him. It was just like the vision he had in his nightmare, where he pictured her above him — only this time, he hoped he would be able to exercise control. They both delay any further movement for a second, allowing all the hesitation, restlessness, apprehension, and vivacity to flow through them.

She placed her hands on either side of his face, cupping his cheeks. His eyes fell closed, comforted and enamored by the gentleness of her fingers. Her warmth melted everything — every anxiety, every fear, every pain. He could cry from the relief alone.

She leans in, and the tip of her nose brushes the tip of his. They breathe each other in like it was the freshest air they've had in years. The tension between their parted lips had them pining for each other's touch. The soft brush of her lips made it feel like time had stopped. He could taste her, smell her, feel her against his skin again.

His metal fingers slip under the straps of her nightgown, pulling it down to reveal her breasts. She leaned back as he got a good look at her, concentrating on the teardrop shape of her breasts with his own eyes. It was killing him. And she realized he couldn't touch her, he wouldn't get to hold her with his own hands. She will never feel the hungry touch of his hand ravishing her again — a touch full of devotion that used to make everything better.

She knelt up so she could feel him against her body. He relished the titillation of her warm breast against his cheek. His lips run along her stiff nipple, tugging on it, making her clutch her thighs tighter together around him. His mechanical hand followed the arch of her back, further pressing her soft, lush curves against his nose. The faintest moan left her lips as the flickering strokes of his hot tongue on her made her toes curl.

She lures his mouth back up to hers and they swap another heavy exhale. She moans nostalgically against his lips as his tongue explores her mouth. He seduces her with open-mouthed kisses, and everything around them vanishes with a smoldering haze. She begins to rub herself on him as she feels his bulge twitch underneath her. Her hot liquid leaks over him, and he groans out.

She moves her hand down to his soaked shaft, stroking him with her feathery touch. Her imploring eyes meet his boldly ogling her.

"Will it hurt?" Her soft-spoken undertone, melodic. The swipe of her velvety fingers makes him breathless as he gawked at her.

"I don't care." He said roughly. His hands quickly cling onto her waist to force his now tormented member inside her.

She sinks down onto him slowly, and his phallus becomes buried in the mouth of her arousal. Nothing will ever feel as good as this — the overload in the throes of passion. They both felt the pull of a ferocious rush.

He can barely keep it together as the familiarity of this fusion deprives him of his senses. He longs to impale her now that he took possession of her. He clutches onto her, lifting her as he stands up, putting those metal legs to good use. Her legs clamping around his waist as he crosses the room with her in his arms, and leans her up against the wall. She always felt petite in her tall husband's arms but now that his mechanics made him even taller, she felt extra small, extra delicate as she was squished between him and the wall. Her long hair, mussed;

her dress now scrunched into a band that hangs around her hips. His hands are planted on her waist, holding her up as he delves deeper into her, embedded in her.

He gives himself to her, over and over, until she is absorbed in this mystic creation that encompasses all of her — one that makes her heartbeat sound louder than it ever could, that makes her legs quake, and her head fall back as she descends into a scorching, dark sensuality. Her hands slither over his sculpted chest and up to his shoulders, holding on for dear life. He may feel physically different but, spiritually, he felt, tasted, and filled her up exactly the same.

He channels his aggression, his desire, and his desperation into her. Her legs dangle behind him, the heels of her feet hitting him. He becomes transfixed by the sounds of her moans turning into a long high-pitched orgasm, as her whole body shakes in his arms as he hits the right spot repeatedly. And he becomes mesmerized by watching her be fulfilled.

And suddenly he understood it — why he struggled to walk the line of light and dark. Why he always acted like a swift breeze could come and sway him either side. He had spent the first 22 years of his life trying to suppress his dark tendencies in favour of the light, and he ended up resentful — and now he has spent the last 10 years robbed of any light, unable to control the dark side eventually overpowering him. How was he ever going to bring balance to the force and ensure the use of the force was healthy if he wasn't healthy himself? The pressure of being the chosen one his whole life felt like a curse, a ruse. He couldn't stop himself from abusing the force, how would he stop others?

But it wasn't the fact that he had dark tendencies that was the problem. Everyone had feelings of anger, greed, and pride. The problem was that he'd allow those emotions to push him over the ledge. When all he had to do was channel them into something productive to find peace of mind... to balance them out so they didn't run wild.

Right now as he made love to her, he was balancing his light and dark side. He was selfish — selfishly taking her body with rapture, trying to gain as much pleasure from her as he could. But he was also being selfless — selflessly pleasing her, wanting to make her happy. And making her happy had him going off like a gunshot, liberated in the intensity of the release — coming inside her felt like coming home.

And he finally got it — balance. Balancing your selfish side with your selfless side is what makes you stable and, in turn, you use the force in a healthy way. Balance makes you human. The Jedi failed to understand that love aids balance, and they witnessed what the absence of love can do to a man.

But even though he was now the most dangerous, terrorizing man in the galaxy, love softened him, calmed him. *She* softened him. She made him human again.

Her body was now limp after being dissolved with the thunderous gratification of all their feelings marinated. He slowed down, gently pumping into her to soothe her. She could barely speak. Her moans were weaker, desperate. Her voice merely above a whisper — completely satisfied with the sensation they experienced together.

His forehead now heavy as it rests on hers, trying to catch his breath. It exerted a lot out of him to release the exhales in his tightened chest but it was also the most peaceful moment he had in a long time — all the pain channeled into pleasure.

He rests inside her, wanting to stay like this forever — with his soul interlaced with hers — grateful that she gave him this moment with such grace. She finds the strength to wrap her arms tighter around his neck, her crevice closing in on his appendage, capturing him in her warm womb, wanting to feel every drop of him in her.

Because he was right. In so many ways, she's in him and he's in her.

*One last time
I need to be the one who takes you home
One more time
I promise after that, I'll let you go
Baby, I don't care; all I really care is you wake up in my arms
So one last time
'Cause I don't wanna be without you*

One Last Time — Ariana Grande

(Moonlight Records — The Quiet — sad version)

21. Rise and Fall

AN:

Travis Brown — Well Obi-Wan is already mentioned in this chapter so you'll kinda know what he's been up to, and then... you'll see :D

Rise and Fall

*I always said that I was gonna make it. Now it's plain for everyone to see
But this game I'm in don't take no prisoners, just casualties
I know that everything is gonna change, even the friends I knew before, they go
But this dream is the life I've been searching for*

*Started believing that I was the greatest — my life was never gonna be the same
'Cause with the power came a different status. That's when things change
Now I'm too concerned with all the things I own. I'm beginning to lose my integrity*

Padme woke up to find the coldness of his metal hand around her contrasting with the warmth from the blanket. She must've fallen into the deepest slumber after they made love because she couldn't for the life of her remember him placing a blanket over them. She already missed the oblivion, the bliss of last night as she looked over at him. The morning after is when the body's fire is put out by the mind's flood of thoughts. She didn't even know what to call him — Anakin? Vader? She knew she saw Anakin last night but who was he now? Will the same face show up when he wakes up. Will he remember the promise his body made to hers — *one last time* — would he finally let her go?

It was all so much easier last night when she was led by desire, familiarity, and comfort, and could remain oblivious to the consequences — they seemed like a world away.

She got up, pulling down her creased nightgown that had ridden up around her waist.

His eyes flickered open, watching her. Her curly hair still wild and tousled as she tried to tame it behind her ears.

"Where you going?" His groggy voice called for her softly. "Come here."

"I want to get back before they wake up." Padme muttered, barely looking at him.

"They'll be fine." He reassured with his arms outstretched for her. She ignored the invitation, her eyes roaming about the floor, looking for shoes or slippers — only to remember she wasn't wearing any when she came in here.

“Stay.” He sat up on the reclined chair that still laid flat. She wondered how they managed to fall asleep on it last night. Looking at it now, it didn’t look large enough for two people.

Taking her hand he pulled her towards him.

She stood in between his legs reluctantly. Unable to look into those deep blue eyes that said so much.

“Padme, last night was...”

“Yeah...” She agreed. Her discreet, wispy tone matched his. They didn’t have an adjective to describe what they both felt so viscerally, they’d need at least a dozen to start. Tumultuous, beautiful, heightened, crazy, passionate, dysfunctional, sweet, tainted, loving, painful... to name a few.

“Look I know what I said... but,” His strong arms encircled her slender waist, his neck didn’t have to crane far back to meet her at eye level — even though he was sitting and she was standing. “I want my wife back.” His inclination to remain tightly woven to her sparked — reborn, the closer he got to her, physically, spiritually.

She glanced down at the floor as he held onto her. *So much for the rationale behind his request last night: **just this once...*** she thought, realizing they were both foolish in their desires. Both wanting their cake and eating it too.

“It was a nice night.” She reasoned diffidently, demurely, shrugging her shoulders. “Let’s just . . . leave it at that.”

She watched his expression change before her eyes. A sudden storm over his features, rancorous stares, exhibiting such acrimony, instability in a sea of confusion.

“Oh.” He let go of her, mumbling to himself. “You don’t want to be with me.”

His eyes flashed darkly. She stepped back instinctively for self-preservation, watching him fetch the pair of loose-fitting trousers that were in the open cabinet next to his chair.

She heard a loud thump when his hand landed on the handle bars of the reclined chair, as he pulled himself up. He took slow, determined, intimidating strides towards her, backing her into a corner. “So why’d you come here last night then? Pity?!” He barked. His voice laced with venom.

Her eyes took on a wider shape. Her heart catches, still shocked by his ability to twist, steal, and drown all innocence. Her face was awash with disappointment. But that was his thing, obsessively corrupting anything pure about himself.

At the flip of a switch, he’s gone dark, cold. Only he could turn in the blink of an eye.

“Huh?!” His palm slammed against the wall beside her head, making her jump. And he hated himself for it. After a taste, a touch of her, despite his immense power, he was reduced to a beggar for her, trying to hold her light and her love captive — here with him — as he was yet to fully tap into his own. He felt it last night though, his potential, his humanity, but the thought of her disappearing left him insecure again. He moved a great leap forward only to fall a few steps back. He wasn’t selfless enough (light enough) to let go.

She shook her head, unrelenting in her determination to not give way to threats or outbursts. *Too many dead-end roads.*

“Okay you want me to come out and say it?” Her glowering eyes landed on his. ‘I don’t believe a word that comes out of your mouth. But last night I had a chance to be with the guy who promised me that he’d leave the Jedi order and our life would finally start. I wanted to spend a night with *him*. But as soon as we wake up, he’s gone. And you’re feeling sorry for yourself?!’ She scorned. “There are no victims in this room! We made our choices...”

His fiery hostility accompanied each struggling breath that cut the air between them, and her eyes began to water as they aimed at his lips, waiting for the lashing of his spitfire tongue to sting her, be mean, vengeful. It was hopeless being hopeful.

“I knew deep down you were never going to settle for an ordinary life.” She sighed with acceptance. ‘But I was in love with you so I wanted to believe it... And even if you did, you’d always be looking over the fence — wanting something more.’ Despite the very real feeling of mourning that weighed her down, she pulled herself together. “Well, now you got more. So. . .let me go.”

His mouth tightly drawn for a moment, actually trying to exercise control, and she could tell it pained him to utter the words he was about to say. “You slept with me for your freedom.”

Looking up at him, she did her best to prevent the spilling of the tears that threatened her. “You know the answer to that. You know what it meant to me... Let it be a great way to say goodbye.”

She studied his face, watching the way his tightened jaw loosened, waiting for a response. She could tell he wanted to retire the angst, give her that relief.

But, immobilized by their harrowing reality, he wouldn’t look her in the eye. “*I can’t.*”

She closed her eyes as a tear itched to be released and let herself out the door. He didn’t try to stop her. His metal hand remained sealed to the wall and his eyes found the empty spot where she had stood.

I live my life in chains; got my hands in chains. And I can't stick with the cards that I got with a deal like this

*Given advice that was clearly wrong. The type that seems to make me feel so right
But some things you may find can take over your life*

*Burnt all my bridges, now I've run out of places, and there's nowhere left for me to turn
I should have learned from all those times I didn't walk away, when I knew that it was best to go
Is it too late to show you the shape of my heart?*

Vader formally greeted Emperor Palpatine once he landed on Mustafar.

“Lord Vader.” That adenoidal voice may be jarring but it kept Vader out of his own thoughts.

“Yes, Master.”

“It’s interesting.” Palpatine began, walking into Vader’s castle. Vader followed him.

“What is?”

“Obi-Wan was found sneaking around the Inquisitors’ Headquarters.” Palpatine forwent another step, causing Vader to stop in his tracks while the Emperor ordered the guards that accompanied him to leave them.

The fading sounds of the guards’ footsteps gave the two of them some clarity. It gave Vader time to process what he just heard. The news astounded him as much as it infuriated him. Obi-Wan would walk right into the belly of the beast.. to save *his* family.

And Palpatine could tell that Vader didn’t know any of this. “I’m surprised it would slip your mind to mention it.”

Palpatine resumed the stroll, a methodical, intentional glide.

“I will have him transferred here.” Vader confirmed impassively, as he caught up with him.

“Perhaps you’re not up for the task.” Palpatine casually pointed out. The Emperor had a way of making his words sound so airily light on the surface with such a heavy, conniving and superior undertone — and they both knew Palpatine noticed his conflict. “You seem. . .distracted.”

Vader’s stiff upper lip wasn’t helping. “I do my duties just fine.”

Palpatine’s eyes finally locked with Vader’s, despite the noticeable height difference. “You know what I like about us, Lord Vader? You can’t lie to me and I can’t lie to you... Make no mistake, we do — we lie all the time. But we *can’t*.”

Palpatine took a seat. “It shows if you respect their abilities, you can work with those you despise.”

Was this a threat? Was he reminding Vader of what he was capable of?

Vader watched as the left side of Palpatine’s mouth turned upward. The Emperor made no real attempt to hide a smirk.

Effortlessly —and to the casual eye, unbothered— Vader spoke a guttural sound from deep in his throat. “They can’t hurt you.”

“Quite the opposite.” Palpatine corrected. His punitive glare unwavering. “But at least you’ll see it coming.”

Vader clicked his tongue. It was becoming difficult for him to maintain his dissimulation. A practice he thought had become part of his nature for the better part of the last decade.

The Emperor often admired Vader’s inscrutable spirit, it made his Enforcer an even greater threat to their enemies — impossible to defeat. But what really stroked his ego was knowing Vader’s weaknesses and how to exploit them. Only he could govern and coerce the heartless,

wise, stoic, ruthless force to be reckoned with that is Darth Vader. *There's always a bigger fish.*

Vader turned to leave, stopped only by the sight of Palpatine's lips twisting into a wry smile. He could feel a battle of wits being waged from six feet away.

The lesser of two evils. At least that's how Vader described himself. It was the silver lining. *At least I'm not as bad as him.* But who was he really? He has been reduced to a shadow of his old self, hiding behind the hideousness of his reality and, ever since, everyone has had to endure his choices.

So in actuality which was worse? He thought. *The man who could debauch your morality, or the man who would debauch his own.*

Vader was just about to walk out the room but Palpatine made sure they were on the same page. "How's the training coming along?"

Vader halted without turning back around.

Right there, *that* was how the Emperor was going to get him. And he saw then just how deep his hole was. Palpatine never goes without a plan. And without realizing it, Vader himself dug these graves, ever since he brought his family here.

*And you can easily gamble your life away
Second after second, and the day by day
You play the game or you walk away*

*Now I know I made mistakes
Think I don't care — but you don't realize what this means to me
So let me have just one more chance
I'm not the man I used to be... used to be*

Padme dropped back onto the couch as her kids ran up to her. She was surprised they were up this early.

"Come here! Come cuddle with me." She sang, wrapping her arms around them as the twins snuggled up either side of her.

Luke observed his mother, wanting to bring up her mysterious disappearance this morning.

"You were with dad weren't you?" He waited for an answer as his mother lowered her head. "...You said you'd be honest."

"Yeah." She responded sheepishly. "I went to see him."

"Are you getting back together?" Leia asked

Padme met them with a glow, a warm but faded smile. "I know you'd like that." *Most kids would.* And she didn't want to let them down.

“But. . .no.” She breathed out anticipating the backlash. “...Are you disappointed?”

She appreciated the calmness that came from her children as they collected their thoughts and feelings. They seemed to be matching her energy — giving into this comforting couch experience.

“Sometimes I just wonder what it would’ve been like.” Leia ruminated. “What he was like *before*...”

Padme felt a pinch of regret, realizing how much her children *didn’t* say all these years when she’d cut off any dialogue that piqued their interest. There was such an emotional void they yearned for her to fill with conversation, memories, and connection. She had to talk now. She had to keep her promise. They had a right to know where they came from. She had to get better at this.

She held onto her children even tighter, resting her head on Leia’s while her fingers drew circles on Luke’s arm.

“Your dad was. . .*magic*. There’s no better word to describe him. He was a ball of energy just like you two, and sometimes I had to slow him down *just* like you two!” She allowed herself to laugh and... reminisce. “It was a fairytale. Like the ones you read.” She turned to Leia.

Padme remembered falling in love so hard and so fast. It was a passion she had only ever dreamed of — never really saw until he came along. She brought a sense of safety and stability to Anakin’s life, and he brought her spontaneity, excitement. It was the perfect blend for a marriage.

Even if they didn’t understand it all, the twins enjoyed listening to their mother talk about him. They were attuned to her effort. And it was cathartic for her too, to choose to remember Anakin in this way.

“I was his anchor, he was my adventure.” Padme reflected. “So... even when it gets hard for me to talk about, just know you were born out of love. True, romantic, sweet, kind love. And I’m so sorry I couldn’t make that last forever.”

“Maybe you could have.” Luke suggested kindly but Padme confidently shook her head.

“Towards the end we fought a lot. He stopped telling me everything... Your father always thought he could fix everything himself. He wouldn’t ask for help.” Padme’s words no longer sounded like she was simply relaying information. She was wholeheartedly letting herself acknowledge it, feel it, accept it, and let it go. “We weren’t each other’s safe space anymore.”

She now held their attentive eyes in hers, watching a curiosity, a melancholy — and a sea of gratitude for her openness — flood their faces. “And then I had you, and that morning when I woke up in the hospital, I knew I had to keep you safe. Nothing will ever take the place of your father, and he’d always be in your lives. But our home wasn’t safe, and I wasn’t going to put you through that.”

Luke and Leia were taking it in — less disappointed and more in a state of limbo.

Padme concluded it all with a sigh and a slight chuckle. “And well I guess it’s easier to forgive people when you think they’re dead.”

Luke sat forward to get a full view of his mother's face. He could tell her words, while intended to make light of the darkness and make a heavy subject easier to digest, were really a way of protecting the tone of their home. "Do you still love him?"

Padme's lips parted as her memories flashed before her eyes. Eventually offering her kids a weakened half-smile. "I always will... Your dad was the love of my life. And that's enough for me. That love now lives on through you... Every time you choose to be happy, you're keeping it alive."

Their expressions brightened and smiles slipped out. And their heartfelt moment was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"That's him!" Leia gasped, quite excitedly.

"Alright, alright. Calm down." Padme teased, getting up.

She made her way to the door. Taking a breath before she faced Vader, she decided to put on a brave face in front of her children, and temporarily disregard their morning that was bereft of hope.

She opened the door and swallowed hard. Staring back at her was...

"Palpatine!"

"Senator Amidala."

*Sometimes in life you feel the fight is over
And it seems as though the writing's on the wall
But once your picture becomes tainted
It's what they call the rise and fall*

*I know that the spades are the swords of a soldier
I know that the clubs are weapons of war
I know that diamonds mean money for this art
But that's not the shape of my heart*

Sting — Shape Of My Heart (Mashup)

Craig David — Rise & Fall

Sugababes — Shape

22. Death Of A Dream - Part I

AN:

SooDarling: He could've... but considering that in canon Palpatine's words were "It seems in your anger you killed her" and then at the beginning of this story he informs Vader of her funeral, I don't think Vader would take his words as more than an assumption since everyone believed Padme was dead — that was her plan, and he couldn't sense her alive since her and Obi-Wan were in hiding. Now finding out she's alive, I don't think he cares about what Palpatine assumed. He could be mad that Palpatine accused him of being responsible for her death but given the information they had at the time, it wasn't exactly a reach :D

BoldenBeau: Hope you like the new chapter you've been waiting for :D And thank you SO much for your review on Wildest Dreams. It is so heartwarming to feel appreciated in such a way. I am so glad you liked it. Thank you for taking the time to write that to me XOXO

The Death Of A Dream — Part I

Would you tell me I was wrong?

Would you help me understand?

There's nothing I wouldn't do

To hear your voice again

Sometimes I wanna call you

But I know you won't be there

With eyes that so desperately wanted to shut and reopen to find this merely a dream, Padme felt an icy jolt pierce through her. Palpatine let himself in, urging her backwards. She was now stood in front of her children, rooted to the spot.

"What do you want?!" Her voice a high-pitched creaky sound, petrification projecting out. Luke and Leia absorbed the stress of their mother, their eyes never leaving the cloaked figure, afraid of what would happen should their attention be diverted. Because the sight was the stuff of nightmares, a thousand scars conjoined to form one pale, hardened face. And the eyes, the colour of yellow amber drawing you in, and once your fear is within their grasp, you fall into the dark abyss.

“To negotiate.” Palpatine suggested. That effortless, formidable stroll bringing him closer to where she stood.

Padme took one more step back, aiming to be the protective barrier separating the Emperor from her children, blocking his path. She became more aware of the flow of breaths that left her lips, knowing how susceptible her children would be to rigid body language, her emotional temperature, and a screaming distress.

“Since when?” Padme did her best to find her centre, stabilizing on the outside, shaking on the inside, keeping her voice low and her tone even.

“It’s what Naboolians do best.” That scraping, nails-on-a-chalkboard voice was impaling, even with an upbeat pitch. “Use their words.”

“Words are our greatest weapons.” Padme reminded. She was discreet, vague, calling his bluff in a way, knowing full well Palpatine was never one to rely on negotiation.

“Unless you have a weapon.” He said with a sneer.

He was weaponizing his words already. His eyes cover her like a dark cloud shading her face, letting her know he’s defeated her before, vividly, politically, devastatingly. He would not give her the gift of thinking she posed any sort of threat — not this time.

But that didn’t scare her. What did scare her was watching his eyes swiftly leave her and land on her son.

“The force is strong with him.” He rasped slowly, coating every word with greed, stretching each syllable callously. He was vandalistic with his hunger for power, and almost gleeful, tickled by the powerful surge he felt through the force, linking him to the boy.

Padme’s heart took a tumble as Palpatine’s malevolent smirk aimed at her kids.

As a tidal wave of despair crashed into them, Padme gathered her children toward her, shielding them as they quivered behind her.

“Luke, Leia,” She rushed with a whisper. “Go to your room.”

“That won’t be necessary.” Palpatine interjected.

Padme clutched onto her children tighter and glared at him deliberately. “Leave them out of this.”

“Why do you think they’re here?” Palpatine’s open palm stretched out, inviting her to take a guess. “Why do you think Lord Vader is training them?”

Padme willed her lips to stop trembling as she pondered that thought with fluctuating doubt. “He wouldn’t...”

“No?” The Emperor’s eyes crinkled at the sides, enjoying her uncertainty.

“He promised he wouldn’t hurt them.”

“And he won’t as long as you comply.”

“...How?” She held her head up — though it was heavy, needing an excessive amount of effort to fabricate confidence in this moment.

“Leave.” He defined. “And let your son fulfill his destiny.”

He watched as her lips were thinning, and her flame-throwing looks targeted him.

“You really think I’m gonna hand my children off to you?!”

“You won’t have a choice. Do as I say or... Lord Vader will take care of you.”

“Your influence on him is not as strong as you think!”

Palpatine chuckled at that, resuming another glorious, painful-to-look-at, slow gait. His circular movements freezing everyone else in the room.

“You’re right about that... Now that I think of it, I may have had an influence on him turning on the Jedi but. . .I never convinced him to turn on *you*... He did that of his own accord.”

He took a final step once he and the senator were toe to toe. “And the children’s safety. . .that’ll be his motivation.”

“Haven’t you taken enough?” She snapped.

But she received a potent, dominant exhale for a reply.

He took another suffocating step closer. “Step aside, senator.”

“No!” She bellowed, fiercely holding onto her children.

“So be it.” Palpatine raised his arms. His ruthless, veiny fingers pinpointing its prey.

“Wanna untie me?” Obi-Wan casually inserted, rattling the handcuffs that restricted his arms. “Settle this man to. . .machine.”

Vader’s head raised, loftily. There was something rakish about his mannerisms, like a cat who has cornered the mouse, knowing its victory is irrefutable.

But he wasn’t expressing jubilation or triumph under the mask, he was spurred on by his vengeance, by the shallowest depths of human emotion. And Obi-Wan’s profound calmness was far too provocative.

He hissed, “You’d risk your life to take my family away from me?”

Obi-Wan held Vader’s vitriolic stare, and didn’t blink, “They’re my family too.”

“Your days of playing house with my wife and kids are over!” Vader’s words dripping with jealousy, hatred.

But Obi-Wan refused to rise to it, seeing beyond the words, the tone of voice. He saw the thinly veiled emotions clawing their way through. Really, Vader was his own prisoner.

“That’s it...” Obi-Wan shook his head, artfully. “It’s just another possession to you. You can’t see beyond yourself. Now I know I made mistakes with you. . .and the Jedi, we failed immeasurably... But at least we fought for something bigger than us. You used to fight

alongside us. You saw every star in the galaxy—that was your dream. Now you only see yourself. The dark side has truly blinded you.”

“Well if it bothers you that much, you should’ve killed me when you had the chance.”

It was hard for Vader to remember what he used to dream of — wanting to free those who were enslaved, fighting for community, stabilizing society. Now all that remained by his side was the force, his belief in its spirituality, its effect, even if he more often than not misused it.

Anakin used to admire how the Jedi philosophy honoured the force, the days when no one would think to abuse it with darkness, egocentrism — a time when Jedi and force-users strived to be healthy to avoid corrupting it. It was a shame for them to become misguided by politics, turning to a corrupt government for leadership, rather than allowing the higher power they claimed to believe in religiously to guide them. All the material found on planets, the superficialities, the crude matter, all were insignificant compared to the force.

It is easy, almost too easy, to give into temporary solutions and satisfactions, but you soon learn that it is worthwhile to sacrifice short-term happiness. Taking the easy way out will always lead to long-term suffering. Vader himself was the perfect example of how the health of the individual represents the overall health of society. We are only as strong as our weakest link. Once a young man, vibrant, and determined to free the controlled began to control the free. His journey mirroring the galaxy — from egalitarian to authoritarian.

Obi-Wan could sense Vader’s conflict through the force. He was mindful of their respective faults. Anakin’s air of superiority, that Vader was so resolutely displaying right now, it frustrated Obi-Wan back then. And Obi-Wan’s criticisms made Anakin feel unloved and unappreciated. Both men felt undermined by the other but Anakin had more to prove. He would not be held back any longer, not by slavers, age, a lack of power, lack of strength, the Jedi, or anything else that shrunk his confidence. He vowed to never feel helpless again. He’s a fixer after all, taking control.

Rivaled like immature brothers, instead of growing like partners — master and apprentice.

Devotion and respect only came with age, evolving, working as a team.

Before that, there was jealousy, competition... and no parental figure to remind them:

Purpose over power. Not power over purpose.

Obi-Wan reminded himself of his purpose as he continued to observe the man in the black suit, trying to read through the subtleties of Vader’s movements, as the Sith Lord mindlessly walked himself in circles, frigid tremors between them.

“Your talent with the force came naturally to you. You didn’t have to work as hard as the others. You outgrew my training, I didn’t know how to help you. For you, it was instinctual. And that made you arrogant. You started believing you could take anything you wanted — and it would come to you. You always succeeded, so then. . .patience was never your friend. You deprived yourself of the wisdom that comes with patience, Darth.”

“I didn’t need patience. I needed your support.” Vader seethed through gritted teeth, tired of Obi-Wan’s sanctimonious talk, of him always trying to deny the darkness, the madness within Anakin that he attempted to run from — the traits Vader embraced, although not without leaving the good behind.

There is no light if you can't cast a shadow. So how is one substantial, how is one whole without a dark side? Anakin always knew he didn't feel like a whole person, until Padme made him feel like one.

It quietened Obi-Wan to hear Vader recall Anakin's feelings. He claimed Anakin was gone yet he was triggered by the same pain, and longing.

"I tried." Obi-Wan's honesty was evident and heartfelt. "I really tried. But you don't make it easy to support you. You make it very difficult."

"Well, it's not your problem anymore."

"And I'm done feeling guilty." A self-assured Obi-Wan hit back. "At some point, your actions are your responsibility."

Obi-Wan had made peace with the calamity, the harm and hurt inflicted. Patience saved him. If there's anything he and Yoda learned from the past it's that wisdom is found in the wreckage of war, never before.

"My responsibilities..." Vader disparaged the words, making a mockery of them. "...I carried you all. I put in the work. I built an Empire!"

"It's not your purpose." Obi-Wan stated calmly, matter-of-factly.

"How would you know?!" Vader spat, feeling challenged, taking Obi-Wan's confidence as a personal insult hurled at him.

"You're not happy." Obi-Wan discerned, and the restlessness of Vader's footsteps was hijacked by his sudden immobility. "You had nothing, and then suddenly you were everything to everyone. And the Emperor convinced — no, you convinced yourself that you were only significant if you had power."

Vader remembered a time of unpolluted curiosity and innocence, when Anakin went looking for answers that Palpatine was happy to feed him. Looking back it was clear that Palpatine's intentions were designed to feed his own ambition but Vader knew deep down that Anakin was going to be receptive no matter what — because he was willing to take the good with the bad — and he was willing to overlook it all for a father figure.

Despite Palpatine's manipulations, the wisdom he imparted *did* help according to Anakin. Palpatine offered healing for a trauma the Jedi couldn't understand. And Anakin felt rooted for, finally, so the sincerity was never questioned, nor was the fact that he was merely being fed a quick fix to his problems. By the time the Jedi recognized how deep-seated Anakin's issues were, they were thrust into war.

"I thought about this day." Vader reflected on his thirst for power, how he got it, and wanting to hold it over Obi-Wan. "—about how I'd make you suffer. A day when my power is impervious to your strategies. I was going to torture you."

"This is torture enough." Obi-Wan rolled his eyes at Vader's refusal to let light penetrate through, even though he was so desperately missing it.

"Not even close. I wanted you and everyone to pay, as I have!" Vader's voice, the sound of roaring crowds coming from one entity, his ego loud and clear. He was volcanic, erupting violently at the thought of seeking justice with every fibre of his being.

But he paused, knowing that after the eruption there is only emptiness. Just like with the Tusken Raiders, the “win” is temporary, it didn’t bring his mother back, it didn’t dilute the pain. The “win” was a lie. Layers of himself dissolve with each kill until he is transparent, and there’s nothing left to shield your vulnerability — unless you’re willing to kill that part of you or, at least, numb yourself well enough to erase the heartache.

The burning desire of revenge is fleeting. It disappears and leaves you hollow once you feed it. The more you feed it, the emptier you are — as though you are giving pieces of yourself away unknowingly.

So why would this “win”, the act of defeating Obi-Wan like it was a trophy he wanted to hang on the mantel, why would it feel any different?

That certainty that once drove him was diminishing now that his family reminded him he’s not entirely gone. It was easier to drown in darkness and feel numb to the light when you think there’s no pieces of you out there.

“But now that you’re here, I don’t care if you live or die.” Vader’s confession even surprised himself. He no longer felt that there was pleasure to be gained in defeating him, as he once told Leia. *She* was more important than revenge. And right now revenge didn’t seem worthwhile at all. The dark shroud was fading, with peace underneath.

He pictured his children’s animated faces. They were ludic, electric, lost in innocent wonderment, still unpolluted by reality’s harshness. An innocence that he found himself protective of.

He felt love seeping through. He wouldn’t even be having this conversation a year ago. Not until his children came along. The twins’ little eyes were an ocean of compassion and love, recklessly holding onto hopefulness. Maybe ignorance *was* bliss. There was something admirable about their belief in the good and all that is light — they were strong, and determined to stay joyful, giving, vulnerable and open to love — just like their mother.

“But my kids do...” Vader admitted reluctantly. “They love you.”

Compassion is essential to a Jedi’s life...

And Vader realized he was still a man, alive (and maybe even... still a Jedi in some way) A man searching for a soul that he lost. And he still wanted it, needed it. The pieces revitalized through his children.

And on that note, Vader was now so viscerally linked to his flesh and blood that he felt a disturbance in the force.

His kids... his kids were in danger.

I’m sorry for blaming you

For everything I just couldn’t do

And I’ve hurt myself

By hurting you

Christina Aguilera — Hurt

23. Death Of A Dream - Part II

The Death of a Dream — Part II

Darth Vader raced to his chamber, consternation inundated him the minute the door slid open. There they were, his children and Padme chained to the railing. Luke and Leia cried for the father as panic splashed over their distraught faces.

“Lord Vader. Just in time.” Palpatine’s smug smile needed to be wiped off. His presence was soaked with darkness, covering joy and colour like vultures swirling around the souls in the room. It was his “Gotcha” moment — his distasteful, insensitive, grandiose abstractions are only to serve him and everyone else is a chess piece.

Vader felt those familiar instincts kick in — unbridled impulses about to erupt, losing rational thought as his emotions become clouded by the sight of his loved ones in danger. He wanted to revert to old habits induced by trauma, to gain control of the mayhem. Something he used to succumb to all the time as a child, trying to combat the chaos around him by fighting back desperately in order to feel competent in an environment that made him feel small, and worthless.

Vader turned his attention to his master, blurring his own thoughts, knowing that his old behavior and past arrogance as he unleashed his power rashly wasn’t a trait to be proud of, and it wouldn’t protect the people he loves. If anything, he lost more control over their safety by not showing restraint back then, and holding on too tight.

“I’ve been explaining to the Senator what a valuable asset we believe these children will be to the Empire.” Palpatine continued. “All she has to do is get out of the way.”

“Is that true?” Disapproval sat upon Padme’s lips, peeling over her underlying sadness, feeling let down. “All this time, you were using them. . .using *us*.”

Any particles of light between her and Vader recoiled as he buttoned his lip under the mask. Even the kaleidoscope of colours that often coruscate around Padme and his children were fizzling out, moving further away from him, and he’s left to fade into the background of black and white, pulled into familiar shades of cold and dullness.

“As you can see, we got off on the wrong foot. Perhaps you’ll do a better job at convincing her.” Palpatine’s covert threats and ultimatums were deliciously evil, offered to Vader like poisonous desserts to the unsweetened tooth, un-turn-downable, no matter how sickly they make you feel — he tries to tempt you, making it sound good... or like it’s the only feasible option.

“And if I refuse?” Vader’s voice monotone in every way, showing all the restraint he could.

"I'm sure you'll do what's right. You know, for the safety of the offspring." Palpatine responded with adamant directness. He wasn't going to risk either of the twins becoming Jedi.

"Anakin." Padme urged, calling to Vader's former self, hoping it would land because right now she needed him to be their *father*. "Save the children! You can't hand them over. Do you want them to suffer your fate—"

"—That's enough." Palpatine cut her off and his focus returned to Vader. He spoke with an even firmer tone, a sharp sting of imposition. "I told you. . .you'll see it coming. I sensed betrayal... But I trust that you now understand why we must respect each other's abilities."

A slight smirk hid behind the mask, as Vader acknowledged the art of learning from your mentors. "You've taught me well, Master. *Always* one step ahead."

Palpatine observed Vader closely, questionably, Vader was far too calm for a man who has just been checkmated.

In that moment, as the Emperor's eyes ran along his metal suit, he was inflamed by what appeared from around the corner behind his apprentice.

Obi-Wan showed up shadowed by the beam of blue light as he took his fighting stance, not the stance of a young warrior in battle anymore, but an evolved stance of an older, wiser, enlightened man whose goal is simply to protect. Palpatine's eyes formed into slits of savagery, and Vader got into position himself, his red lightsaber humming at his side.

A blinding bolt of lightning shot at both men, lighting up the entire chamber, only hindered by the swift thrashes of lightsabers in an attempt to capture it — lightning bottling up in a blade. Obi-Wan held his blue plasma weapon with both hands, shielding himself from the surge of brutal energy.

The Emperor felt electricity coursing through his veins, feeling drunk with power as the force left his body and aimed at the two men. Blue lightning cased their laser swords and ultimately pervaded the air around them. Vader took a step towards the Emperor, defiantly pushing back, wanting to deflect Palpatine's power back onto him. Obi-Wan, however, felt the outpouring of evil wrap around his hand after enveloping his blade, causing his saber to drop to the ground, leaving him vulnerable to an electric shock coming his way.

There were startled gasps from the kids as they quailed and cried, worriedly watching their uncle fall to the ground unconscious.

Vader managed to hold his own, slowly but surely getting closer to Palpatine, now using both hands to block the active efflux of rabid heat. But with both of Palpatine's hands now expending all their energy onto one target, Vader began to struggle, feeling flaming sparks prick his suit.

It felt as though Palpatine was rising over, vanquishing Vader, making him smaller and his lightsaber heavier, encompassed in shockwaves.

Luke, upon watching his father flounder, glanced at Obi-Wan's lightsaber, twisting his arm trying to call to it from in between his metal constraints. His movements slow, orderly, drawing the blade to him. With the saber physically in his grasp, he cut through his chains and snuck up behind the Emperor.

Vader caught a glimpse of his son and the blue gleam surrounding him. He couldn't let this pollute Luke's spirit. This was bigger than the force, bigger than the dark side. It was the unconditional, unselfish, invincible kind of open-heart love a parent has for their child.

To preserve his son's innocence, he gathered all the strength he had, evoking as much of the force as he could to relieve one of his hands, to telekinetically snatch the lightsaber from his son.

Vader raised his hand at an angle and the blade was pulled towards him, slicing through Palpatine's wrists just before Vader caught it.

Palpatine was ambushed by the glow of red and blue light as Vader crossed both swords over his neck, adopting his typical arrogant stance, blocking his victims' freedom.

"Go ahead." Palpatine retorted. "Show your children who you really are. Yet again ready to take the life of an unarmed opponent. Driven by your anger and hatred. Let them see this is who you'll always be. A slave to your emotions. This night will stay with you, as did the others. You are forever a murderer."

An indecisive Vader's eyes swept over his son, his daughter, Padme and back at the Emperor. His head faltered, his heart landing on the floor. He was a contradiction, a cold-blooded killer and yet the poster boy for crimes of passion. The Emperor was right. As tragic as his downfall was, *Palpatine didn't give Anakin anything that he wasn't already looking for.*

The road to hell is paved with good intentions, especially when you live in fear and allow it to dictate your actions. He created this self-fulfilling prophecy, making his fears a reality in his desperation. His lust for power and revenge grew the more he got a taste, and it made him lose sight of his original purpose.

"...I can live with that." Vader accepted it all, his well-intentioned mistakes and his irredeemable, impetuous actions that followed.

Padme quickly ordered her kids to look away as they heard the coarse sounds of the two lightsabers sliding along each other before cutting into Palpatine's skin.

A moment of silence as the body fell to the floor.

Thoughts, words, a subtle alchemy, as they are swept away with this night, and transformed into this eventual peace swaying between everyone in the room. No matter what it took to get here, the darkness and violence no longer had their attention, just their memory.

Vader proceeded to unchain Padme and Luke followed suit, freeing his sister. Everyone was quiet, calming their nerves, waiting for the state of shock to pass.

"Thanks." Padme spoke to Vader with her exquisite brand of softness as she rubbed her wrists. They were all distracted by the sounds of Obi-Wan writhing about on the ground. Vader looked on as Luke and Leia rushed to his former friend's side.

If I had just one more day

I would tell you how much that I've missed you since you've been away

Oh, it's dangerous
It's so out of line
To try and turn back time

Vader watched as his kids smothered Obi-Wan with affection, pulling the man up by the arms to sit upright. The twins were over the moon to reunite with him.

Vader felt it all, heartache, yearning, all with open pores. Emotions he had suppressed once he was encapsulated in the black metal suit. When that mask covered his face a decade ago, gone was the fragility of Anakin's feelings, disappeared along with warmth and purity. He never learned to control his emotions, only suppress or release thoughtlessly, such extremes, no balance, no middle ground... a disheartening failure. A lesson he longed to learn, true stoicism and safe vulnerability from a strong, loving father.

But now a long overdue reemergence — all those sumptuous feelings absorb him with an enormous hunger, fighting to refill, to come back, in a healthier way, to a place Vader had shunned them from. The emptiness, the void, the vacuum was no longer a place where he could seek shelter. No more denial. He was now present, bare, exposed. Anakin asserted himself front and centre. He had to unsheathe the mystery, accept the deprivation. He had to call it what it really was, what he didn't want to accept — *loss*. He lost his family 10 years ago, and he can't have those days back.

Padme turned her attention to Vader. She knew his reaction underneath the mask would be something akin to heartbreak. She imagined it would be difficult for him to see the relationship Obi-Wan had built with the children over the years while he was *here*.

There will never be a requiem for his dream — for the death of a life with Padme and his children — there was no time to mourn its passing.

And that was his fault. He valued power over purpose, addicted to self-serving ideals, he cut corners to get there and now he's paying for taking the easy way out.

He is a victim of his raw choices.

And it doesn't matter that the Jedi failed him when he struggled with his identity or that he succumbed to Palpatine's manipulation when he needed guidance.

It doesn't matter anymore because he chose to numb himself for ten years rather than do anything about it...

until now.

Vader felt Padme's eyes on him like a comforting breeze giving him strength. Looking back at her, he decided to rip off the band-aid. "You're free to go."

Padme's eyebrows raised, her expression loud, her voice plain, almost in disbelief. "What?"

"Obi-Wan'll take you home."

Obi-Wan and the kids looked up at them, catching wind of their conversation. Padme took a subtle step closer to Vader, seeking some resemblance of privacy.

She practically whispered, “What about you?”

“What about me?” Vader seemed peaceful, embodying a gradual acceptance of fate.

But Padme wasn’t quite as calm. Her sensitive eyes in search of closure. She glanced around the room before her eyes landed back on him. “...Come with me.” She said with a shrug that merged hope and hopelessness.

“Padme...” Vader shook his head, gently letting her down. He would not allow her or himself to deny what was necessary. And he had absolutely no intention of being crippled by fear.

“W—we can find a way.” Her voice was wobbly, trying to find her bearings in an insecure sea of unpredictability.

But the tender resolution in his voice, the strength in his deep bass tone, and the calmness of his essence assured her he had thought it through, he was thinking clearly — now more so than ever. “You already have two kids to feed, bathe, take care of... You don’t need another.” He established. “I’m bound to this place.”

He looked into her magnetic brown eyes still full of sweetness as if they weren’t once stripped of promises. But he noticed the conflict, the uncertainty. He could see the unhealed wounds, hear the abandoned truths, and read what was never said out loud. Denial flooded her features as she clung onto a hypothetical alternative.

Her tentative thoughts are diffused by the sound of his synthetic voice carrying so much density. She gazes through his lenses as he speaks, and she knows the man before her isn’t Vader.

This is Anakin, as he states forthrightly, “And if I loved you... *If* I truly loved you, I wouldn’t make you stay.”

He realized that somewhere along the way he began chasing the wrong dream. He thought power was his dream. He thought it would end the chaos, the trauma, give his life structure, security, and freedom. He would finally have control, complete autonomy for the first time in his life.

Power meant control, control meant the ability to protect those he loves, protect everyone from pain and suffering by defeating his enemies. But gaining power is a double-edged sword — the more you get, the more you want. It’s a bottomless pit of insatiable hunger. And what the desire for control really does is push everyone away as you exert your power over them in the name of love, in the name of safety and security — because love and peace can’t be taken, it must be given.

It became clear to him that you have to allow yourself to be vulnerable when you love. You have to accept that openness. Sometimes in life there will be fear for those you love, you won’t always be able to protect them. But you can’t let that fear cloud your judgment — *control is not protection*. You just do the best you can, stay in the moment, present, so you can adapt and live it.

That was what love is. Like a river. It needs to flow, you can't stop it. You can't break its fall. You can slow it down, speed it up, but you have to go along with the waves. There's no changing its direction or cutting it off. And he'd rather go with the tides, as precarious as they may be. He'd prefer to be overflowing with love, pouring it all into his family than be here, in his suit, in this dehydrated darkness, trying to control, to hold the water current.

Anakin turned to the twins, determined to be the father he once needed.

"Luke, Leia!" He called them over with loving assertion. He knelt down before them, "Help me take this mask off. I want to see you both with my own eyes."

They joined in on the fun, pulling the helmet over their dad's head. And they saw him. The scars didn't burn them because they knew who the man was beneath them. Their faces restful as they embraced this soulful connection. The heart knows what the eyes cannot. *He is their father.*

Leia held his hand as a smile graced her lips, while Luke looked adoringly at the man who gave him the final puzzle piece, completion.

"Your eyes." His son mused. "They're blue. . .like mine."

It was overwhelmingly fulfilling for Anakin to see them so clearly smiling back at him. He felt accepted, respected, loved and, most of all, *seen*.

But Leia's smile soon faded, realizing this was it. This was the goodbye.

"Will we ever see you again?" She asked

Anakin didn't know what to say. He didn't want to make promises he couldn't keep. "... What does your heart tell you?"

The ends of Luke's mouth curved up into a joyous, boyish smirk, knowing that nothing could break this connection that they repaired, not even distance. And that gave Leia peace of mind.

Anakin pulled them both in for a hug, immersed in the kindness and snuggly texture of loving arms, a circle of trust, the sensitivity of a comfort blanket, and the softness of their flesh, of feeling their warm cheeks against his — that was the purest form of a dream.

He then got up, taking their hands and leading them to the door where Obi-Wan stood.

Obi-Wan studied his former padawan, and all the senses, the instincts awoken in the silence. The silence conjures up an alertness, allowing him to look upon the face of Anakin Skywalker and see the same crystal blue eyes of the boy he met on Tatooine regain a new hope.

Knowing he'd protect them, Anakin shook Obi-Wan's hand, ensuring his children knew he approved of the life they would have without him. It was a way to show he would not undermine Obi-Wan, rather show appreciation, and even gratitude, for the things they actually got right together.

Obi-Wan shot him a nod, polite, heartwarming — but with a tinge of wistfulness and nostalgia for a bond with smoother, lighter intricacies.

Obi-Wan led the children out the door and Padme followed. She made her way to the doorframe only to turn back.

As the twins and Obi-Wan's footsteps faded into the distance, she found herself walking back towards Anakin.

Without thinking, she pulled him in for a soft peck as her lips lightly brushed his, an opportunity to hold onto the moment and old feelings a little longer. She tried to read his reaction once they broke apart, holding his eyes once they opened. He was taken aback. His eyes hone in on her mouth with wonder and pleasant confusion, favouring the satisfying taste. He found himself leaning back in, engulfing her with a carnal desire, as he deepened the kiss the second time around.

A kiss that was fire to the touch, a rush of untold perfection, a head-swirling, heart racing act of devotion.

And as they were slowly released from each other's arms, her illuminating smile shone brightly on him, louder than words, knowing that between them they shared an admiration, a genuine appreciation for all the little things that make up their past, present, and curious future.

She backed away amiably, not wanting to tamper with this feeling of peace and forgiveness... a final, loving, and replete goodbye.

I would hold you in my arms

I would take the pain away

Thank you for all you've done

Forgive all your mistakes

There's nothing I wouldn't do

To have just one more chance

To look into your eyes

And see you looking back

24. Epilogue

Epilogue

*Where it was dark, now there's light
Where there was pain, now there's joy
Where there was weakness, I found my strength*

A new day has come

Padme joined Obi-Wan and the twins in the living room. She watched perceptively as Luke and Leia enjoyed their zestful companionship with their Uncle Ben, inheriting the encouragement and wisdom he passed down with hugs, animated playfulness, and witty banter. The children taught him a lot too. They gave him a sympathetic understanding of love, relationships, and society, making him a sage Jedi Master.

Obi-Wan caught a glimpse of Padme once the children settled down on the sofa beside him after doting on each other with style and grace and partaking in some well-intentioned cheekiness.

“How are you doing?” He paid heed to the other adult in the room, airing out comfort in this state of calm that surrounded the coffee table.

“Good actually!” She responded with an appropriate level of sanguinity while she continued to watch Leia and Luke, who were now immersing themselves in their colouring books, unleashing their creativity — feeling relaxed in their own home, stabilized by the safety of a loving unit provided by their mother and uncle.

“Did you ever find that girl?” He asked, recapturing Padme’s attention.

“Yeah, thanks to our newly elected Chancellor Organa.” Her grin soon morphed into humility. “It was the least I could do. . .make sure Taul’s sister will be alright.”

She accepted the rush of wild instinct that pervaded her. A mother tends to adopt many children, taking them all under her wing and sheathing them in her feminine spirituality — not to over-shelter but to expose them safely and steadily to culture, independence, and growth. She is willing to sacrifice for their well-being, and share her maturity. A concept Padme believed helped her as a politician. Perhaps all politicians should grant their people the same uninterrupted respect, protection, and freedom.

Admiring the lessons learned along with recent accomplishments, she refocused her thoughts. “How are *you* feeling?”

“Determined. Hopeful... At peace.” Obi-Wan said with a twinkle in his eye. “Which reminds me, I better get going.”

Leia's meditative eyes lifted, ever-present.

"Wish you didn't have to go." She whined, fighting the urge to sulk.

Obi-Wan wrapped his arm around her. "Well, I'll always come back." He included Luke in the conversation with a gentle squeeze of his shoulder. "And you two might be joining me before you know it — if your mother says it's okay."

He looked up at Padme who shot them a wink. "Definitely."

"I am *ready* for Jedi school." Luke assured.

"It'll be ready for you soon enough." Obi-Wan playfully messed Luke's hair before getting up. It was time for him to embark on his new journey, one that would only improve the bond he had with the twins. He will always be their protector. "Now be good while I'm away."

After a series of cuddles, elongating the goodbye, Obi-Wan kissed Padme's cheek and led himself to the door.

"Say hi to Master Yoda." Padme insisted as her kids mirrored her, waving their hands until Obi-Wan closed the door behind him. This wasn't the end and they knew it. But it was a situation they had to get used to. And it was a challenge, first saying goodbye to their long lost father and now Old Ben.

However, balance and boundaries keep you in check, they inform of a gift revealed at the end of the tunnel.

Obi-Wan would no longer live with them but they were joined to one another forever — just as they are now forever tied to Anakin through their newfound bond, even if he can't be here.

The space Kenobi must leave between himself and the children will be narrowed shortly, as they unearth the fullness of life, the spectrum of meaningful connection. Obi-Wan was on a mission to rebuild the Jedi Order for their future, dedicating his days, months, and years to the greater good, a healing purpose raising consciousness — and soon, they will be reunited at the Jedi temple, uplifting a sanctuary, empowering a generation, shedding old systems for broader beliefs to flourish, and willingly letting life unfold in the space of light.

"Who's Master Yoda?" Curiosity tempted Luke as he tugged at his mother's nightgown.

Padme looked down at her son, her gaze rewarded him with kindness, an emblem of peace. "You'll find out."

Her words shatter shadows of uncertainty, as she remains giddy and whimsical, reminding her children that only light awaits them now... *blessings*. They are free to bask in silly smirks and funny anecdotes as they prepare for the bright future ahead. "Now come on, it's way past your bedtime."

Padme closed the kids' bedroom door behind her once the twins fell asleep. Heading back into the living room, she was stopped by the sight of a cloaked figure on the landing deck. Feeling like her feet were nailed to the floor, she quickly gathered herself knowing that there

was a calmness, a brightness scattered, able to individuate this presence from other intruders at her door.

The man removed his cloak and she felt a magnetic pull of her heart, untangling herself from any initial fear. The man made his way into the apartment and she could see with clear, primitive eyes, *Anakin Skywalker*.

With artificial lungs, Anakin no longer needed a mask. He built himself a more efficient and flexible suit not dissimilar from what he once wore with a tabard over his black leather armor — a suit to regain his agility, which became easier to maintain with his arms now resembling real flesh. His legs were still removable metal limbs but he was no longer dependent on a machine and wires to live, breath, sanitize, and sleep.

“What are you doing here?” She asked as she found the capacity for an awakening far away from unnecessary words of the past. There was nothing she wanted to bring up. There was no need to look back, question, deliberate on the happenings during their quiet moments of separation ever since he set them free. She didn’t want to know how they got here — just that he was here now, and why.

Anakin held out his hand and in his palm was her japor snippet she must have left behind on Mustafar when packing up their belongings — the first gift he ever gave her remained the only symbol of their marriage the night the Empire rose. It was more substantive than a wedding ring and deeper than they could articulate. *The first and last token of their love.*

“You forgot this.” The soothing nature of his voice sounded better without a breathing mechanism. It still had a smoky, husky edge, sounding experienced and less impulsive compared to his youth. But the once wispy tone of Vader trapped in a suit was now clearer through the healing of his lungs. More importantly, he sounded like Anakin, not Darth Vader.

She received the necklace. “Thanks.” Her tone toasty and subtle like lighting a candle to set the mood, peace growing freely like a wildflower, washing away tension and friction, manifesting wholeness. “I’ve been looking for that.”

The interaction was salvation; however, the distance between them was palpable. *Some feelings never change, only circumstances.* Neither quite ready to abolish hesitance and fill the space with their sensual souls and their hearts’ desires. It required an act of bravery to inspire a new beginning. But bravery looked different now. The turmoil was over, the Empire had fallen, and the darkness was merely a historical museum civilians reflected on.

“Anything else?” She pressed, studying him, concealing her hope for good news.

Anakin sensed her observance. He was wiser, consistent, capturing Padme’s curiosity as he remained patient, standing before her with his mouth now cracking into a smile. It was refreshing to be able to see his facial expressions out in the open again — no mask, no helmet, no deviating from truth and reality.

He was collected, giving her a nonchalant delivery of words. “I missed home.”

She took a breath, a beat behind, taking her time to digest it all.

She absorbed his words, his love, and his harmony like a sponge. Garnering fate now seemed sexy and fun, no longer unapproachable.

It was now his turn to take a breath, still quite a strong, distinct breathing sound — a mystical and synchronicity sign. He was internally healing in many ways, a metaphorical iron lung romanticized as he attempted to make his new normal a messenger of recovery.

Looking at her in her baby blue nightdress and hairband to match, keeping her delicate curls away from her face, he couldn't quite read her expression. She was mysterious, gentle, cautious...

Until a splash of lightheartedness spread from her effortless sigh. "You're home *now*."

Her lips curved up at the sides and his arms quickly surrounded her, feeling fulfilled in her warm embrace. Their lips hungrily touch and she drags him by the hand to her boudoir — where it all began, where they can withdraw from the outside world, and rest where love and memories are kept.

The home of long lost dreams . . . reborn.

I was waiting for so long, for a miracle to come.

Through the darkness and good times,

I was waiting for you.

Hush, now

I see a light in the sky

Oh, it's almost blinding me

I can't believe I've been touched by an angel with love

Let the rain come down and wash away my tears

Let it fill my soul and drown my fears

Let it shatter the walls for a new sun

A new day has come

Celine Dion — A New Day Has Come